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10BEST

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page 28

THE NISSAN KICKS GETS A NEW AND BETTER ATTITUDE

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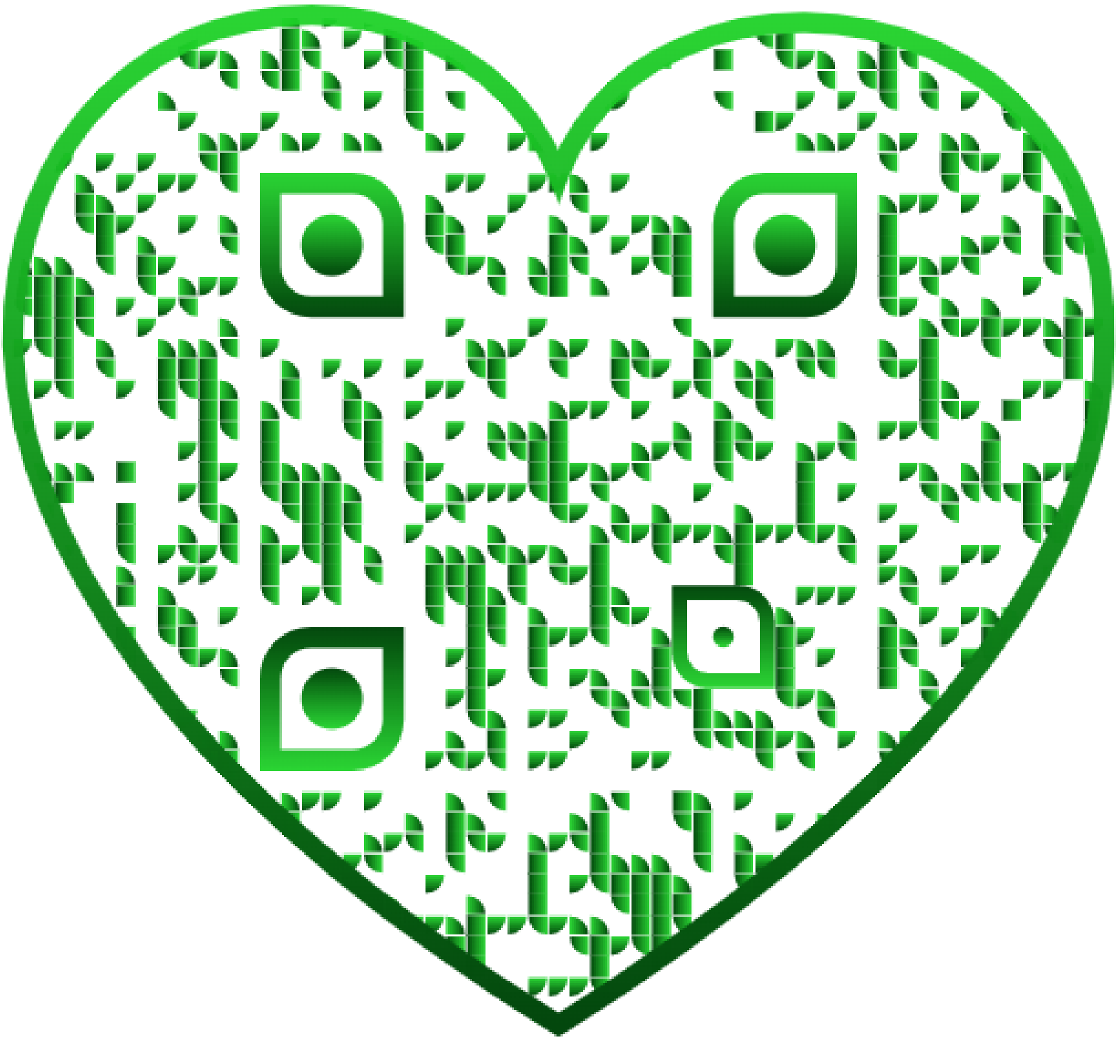
AFTER GOING MISSING FOR MORE THAN 40 YEARS, THE SCOUT RETURNS



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CAR AND DRIVER
2025

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Letter from the Editor

–

Tony Quiroga

At the risk of pulling the curtain too far back, here's a peek behind it.

This year's 10Best competition brought out 98 vehicles, each fighting for a spot on the lists on page 28. Go to caranddriver.com for more 10Best coverage.

ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE you to this issue by sharing some of the planning, dealings, and thinking that went into it. A little of how the sausage is made, or, to put it in automotive terms, how the limited-slip additive is made.

The 10Best issue you hold in your hands is the product of months of preparation and stress. Planning begins in June, when a few senior editors meet with our managing road test editor, Becca Hackett, to create a list of what vehicles are new or significantly refreshed. Emails eventually go out to the brands' communications departments. Upon receiving their invitation to the dance, the capable and confident PR pros are ready to do every part of the Cha Cha Slide, even the Charlie Brown, to ensure that their vehicles have a chance to win. Unfortunately, a few automakers employ people who don't seem to understand competitions. It's also possible that they realize their car is deeply disappointing and stay away to avoid embarrassment.

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG PAJO

Thankfully, the vast majority get it, resulting in this year's bumper crop of 98 test cars, trucks, SUVs, and vans—we misplaced only one key, and it was in my pocket. Over two weeks, the editorial staff and a few trusted freelancers circulate through the returning winners to set a baseline and get into the new stuff with an eye toward what might unseat the incumbents. In the end, a list emerged of 10 cars and 10 trucks, SUVs, and vans that knocked our hats into the creek, to paraphrase former editor-in-chief David E. Davis Jr. Check them out starting on page 28.

Here I am to spoil two surprises. One: Soylent Green is people. Two: The Ford Ranger Raptor is on the 10Best list. Everyone's Stetsons were soaked after a drive in the Ranger Raptor. It was dubbed the Michigan Miata for its playful nature, quick moves, willing engine, and ability to turn on the serotonin. Seemingly designed for the scablands that we call roads here in the Mitten State, the Ranger Raptor's suspension—crude solid rear axle and all—makes Michigan's DOT seem a lot better at road maintenance than it is. This Ranger also delivers cornering joy and sports-car-like acceleration. Ride and handling in a pickup? What's next? A supercar with a limousine ride?

All of this got our testing team thinking. Ride is a vast subject, and readers are interested in it, but until now, *Car and Driver* has offered only experiences and subjective comparisons. Testing director Dave VanderWerp knew we could do better, so he decided to untangle the complex interplay of the parts between the pavement and your pants. VanderWerp's scientific way of analyzing and quantifying ride quality is on page 66.

A careful analysis of your emails reveals a few things: You love to point out errors, you don't like electric cars, and you want to see tests of less expensive cars. We got you, fam. On page 58, there's a test of the Nissan Kicks, the brand's least expensive SUV. Is it as good as it looks? Is it as good as a Chevrolet Trax? What about its ride?

Maybe I've revealed too much about the ministrations behind this issue. Maybe you should know that limited-slip differential additive used to be made from spermaceti, also known as sperm-whale oil. Moby Dick in your differential. Bet you didn't know he was the Mob in Mobil 1. Okay, I made up that last part. Enjoy the issue.

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BACKFIRES

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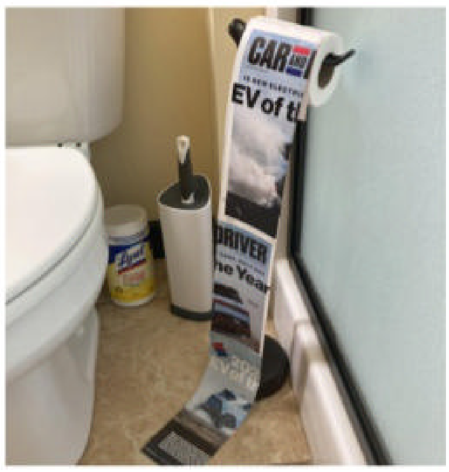
Think of it as the peer-review section of the magazine, hosted by your pal Ed.

CAR AND DRIVER
18 NEW ELECTRIC CARS, ONLY ONE
EV of the Year

SHOW PLATE

Since you've received much praise for your new magazine look, I'd suggest raising the bar one more time by making your September/October 2024 EV of the Year issue in the attached format. It would provide a practical use for the issue most of us internal-combustion-engine fans breeze through in about five minutes, as well as allow green-energy fanatics who love to push EVs the joy of knowing this issue won't end up in a landfill.
—Ronald N. Brown Jr.
Toledo, OH

I know a Tony Packo's bathroom when I see one—Ed.



I'm glad you explained the photo on the cover. At first glance, I thought it was one of the many EVs that had burst into flames for no reason.
—Robert Broaddus
Arlington, TN

Is the Ioniq 5 N shredding tires? Or is it on fire?
—Dave Bain
Naples, FL

I liked the license plate on the cover. Childish, I know.
—Todd Thomas
Downers Grove, IL

All of you can read that plate, but you can't read a spider graph?—Ed.

ELECTRIFIED LETTERS

Regarding "2024 EV of the Year" in the September/October 2024 issue: My popcorn and Big Gulp are ready. Bring on the EV haters, the ones whose great-grandfathers telegraphed cancellation threats to *Wagon and Harness Maker* magazine over their latest horseless-carriage article.
—David Smith
Kentville, NS

I was deeply disappointed by the EV of the Year coverage. Surely there is much more interesting auto news to cover. Yes, these one-trick ponies are fast, but based upon their tepid sales, most auto enthusiasts or customers aren't interested in them. I could go into the overpromised and underperforming environmental-impact aspects of these vehicles or the negative impact that adopting them would have on the U.S. auto industry, but that's for another discussion.
—Larry Baer
Lehigh Valley, PA

I have two things to say about your EV of the Year issue. One, I don't care whether the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N is an EV; it's an awesome car, and people should respect it. Two, why do you think Honda and Toyota haven't made more EVs?
—Blake Dose
Germantown Hills, IL

They're too busy making our readers happy—Ed.

Maybe I missed it previously, but I think your readers in the northern United States and Canada would love to

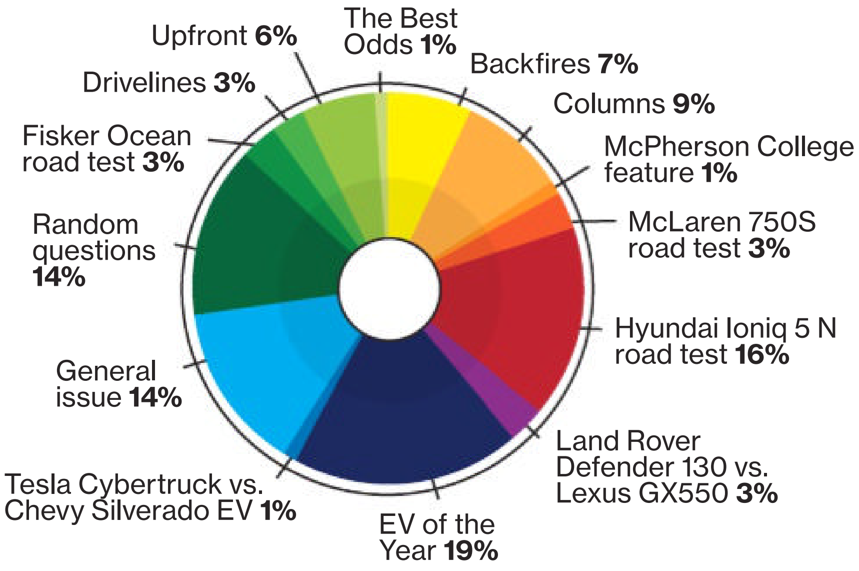
LETTER OF THE ISSUE

You really know how to rub salt in a wound—a wound you created. I first learned about the Fisker Ocean One in a *Car and Driver* article. Intrigued, I did more research, submitted my $5000 deposit, and took delivery about a year ago. The problems began immediately. My Ocean would not move after it was left dirty and uncharged in my driveway. Opening the doors required several presses on the key fob and even more prayers (or the opposite). Sometimes, halfway to a destination, the car decided it needed a rest and would stop moving, in any direction. In a supermarket parking lot, my dog was locked in the car because the doors would not open. Then the alarm went off. For two hours, everyone who walked by thought I was trying to steal my car or kill a dog. Or both. The air-conditioning vents broke. Forget trying to sync your phone with the car's software. In fact, forget the software altogether. It had more bugs than a Fourth of July picnic. Based on what I read online from other owners, my Ocean was among the better examples—my wife and I were able to use it to go places outside my garage. A few months ago, I purchased a Mustang Mach-E GT. The Ford dealer was one of the few willing to accept a Fisker as a trade-in. I lost a lot of money. My reputation as a car guy took a big hit, especially with my wife. I'd almost stopped blaming *C/D* for my naïveté and stupidity, and then I saw the Ocean test in your September/October 2024 issue ["Ocean Blues"]. Have you no shame? I would cancel my subscription, but I can't afford the postage for the cancellation notice.
—Philip Brewer, Mill Valley, CA

We think the emotional baggage created by your Fisker experience will fit nicely into this handsome leather bag that Delta sends to its favorite frequent fliers—Ed.

COVER IMAGE: MARC URBANO; EV TOILET PAPER: COURTESY OF RONALD N. BROWN JR.; LEATHER BAG: MICHAEL SIMARI

BACKFIRES IN COLOR



THE WHEEL GOES ROUND: Your emails about September/October largely questioned our Electric Vehicle of the Year feature. We hear you, but remember: Coverage of EVs does not equal endorsement.

see a range test on electric vehicles in the real-life conditions we live in for many months of the year. I think your readers would really like to see a test at freezing and below-freezing temperatures. I think you will find that the range for most EVs will be at least half. It would also be interesting to see the results of how the chargers operate in these temperatures.
—Randy Aston
Lloydminster, AB
Our long-term 2019 Tesla Model 3 lost 20 percent of its range during the coldest days of a Michigan winter—Ed.

EV of the Year (The Sound of Silence) brought to you by: ELECTRON and WATT Inductance. Impedance. Incandescence.
—Claus Geisslinger
Rehoboth, MA

Tesla cars are named after Nikola Tesla, a pioneer in alternating current (AC). The fastest way to replenish their batteries is from a DC charger.
—Al Lampe
Washington, MO
Speaking of AC/DC, you ever just jam out to the song "Thunderstruck"?—Ed.

At what point will we know the life of the electric motors inside an EV? With most gas-powered vehicles, the engine is good until about 200K miles. Diesels can last for more than 300K. But at what mileage will an EV motor stay reliable?
—Hunter O.
Howell, MI

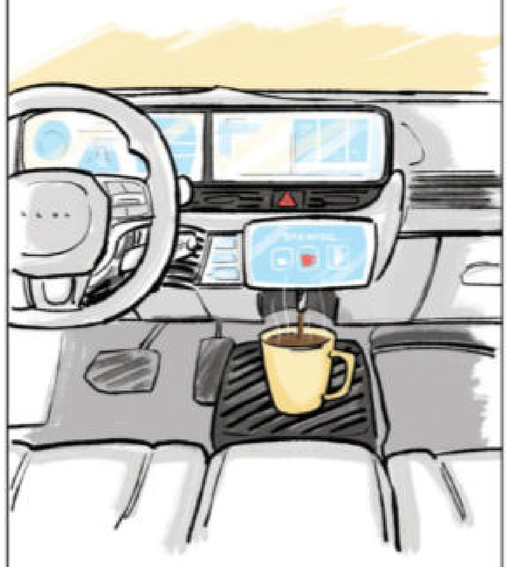
Thank you for your recent issue on electric cars. The editors seem enthralled by the synthetic noises and gearchanges in the Ioniq 5 N. Life moves on. Did the Model T have a button to go "clip-clop, clip-clop, neigh?"
—Jim DeMartini
Kentfield, CA

Enough with the EV articles. By next summer, they will be worth the same as golf carts. The end is near.
—Eugene Tonello
Lake Wales, FL
I think you mean the end is nigh, or neigh—Ed.

I got my *C/D* and dug into it with enthusiasm. My hopes were dashed, as many pages were devoted to EVs. I guess since I do not like to be force-fed reviews of electric cars, I am not one of your target customers. What was once a slow, enjoyable read is now a fast page-flipping read, as I turn past electric vehicles. Perhaps you should consider that your core group wants nothing to do with them. So, with that said, my renewal will need to be reconsidered. I know that this comment will not see the light of day, but it is written so you wake up to the fact that EVs will be the leisure suit of the car industry.
—Al Tucce
Maitland, FL
***Leisure Suit of the Car Industry* is the working title for my autobiography—Ed.**

5 ALIVE

What's that you say? The new Hyundai Ioniq 5 SuperTurbo+ has 1500 horsepower and brews a hot cuppa with every startup ["Make the Shift," September/October 2024]? Funny, I still don't care.
—Sam Hake
Middletown, CT



I could see $67,495 for an Ioniq 5 N, but $1000 for the paint and $210 for the floor mats? Well, that's just insane.
—John Klein
Greensburg, PA

In "Make the Shift," you say, "The sound and shifting simulacrum isn't for everyone." Much like the word "simulacrum."
—Kevin Meehan
West Hurley, NY

CHART SMARTS

What have you done to the "Competitors" graphic [September/October 2024]? Before, it was a beautiful polar plot. It was tight and intuitive with the "best" parameters on the outside perimeter, so if the featured vehicle was the best in all categories, it literally encircled all the inferior ones. It had a nice natural, concise cohesiveness. Now you've literally unraveled the plot and added Bézier curves but somehow got it all wrong. The "best" parameters are now on the bottom of the graphic? Throughout human history, the human brain has associated the top with the best: Olympic medal platforms, stock-price charts, carnival hammer challenges, etc. This flat mess reeks of nonintuitive pessimism and cognitive dissonance. It makes me sad.
—Robert Burrowes
Lake Frederick, VA
Now I'm thinking it was a branding issue. "Polar plot" sounds a lot less scary than "spider graph"—Ed.

I bet you interpolated a nonsensical curve between unrelated measurements so someone would write, "Please bring back the spider graph."
—David Doudna
Sunnyvale, CA

I'm guessing that you have received plenty of comments about the new comparison chart, but, hey, here's one more! For the first five metrics, the higher up the chart, the better the score. However, the roadholding and fuel-economy metrics are the opposite: the lower on the chart, the better the score. Is that intentional?
—Keith Zangara
Macedonia, OH
It was, but we've since changed it so that better results are all at the top—Ed.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRETT AFFRUNTI

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BACKFIRES

Spider Chart
Spider Chart
Does whatever . . .
Oh hell, you know.
Time for the stake
to the heart.
—Bill
Nicholasville, KY

GOING, GOING, GONE
I have a lot of respect for serial entrepreneurs who risk it all to build new enterprises. Props to Henrik Fisker—following a billion-dollar flameout with the Karma in 2013, he had the cojones to chase his EV dreams with the Ocean. Sadly, this startup floundered amid tepid demand for the Ocean, quality issues, and slower-than-expected EV market expansion overall. His was not the first EV startup to suffer this fate and will not be the last. That said, I'm not sure a full review of the Ocean One was really necessary post-bankruptcy ["Ocean Blues," September/October 2024]. A shorter version of the article might simply read: Fisker Ocean One: RIP.
—Charlie Pick
Northfield, IL

A potentially interesting electric SUV, the Fisker Ocean One suffers from some rough edges.

by Csaba Csere
photography by Marc Urbano

OCEAN BLUES

NO SALE: Our road test of the Fisker Ocean One in the September/October issue was intended to be a snapshot of a vehicle taken moments before the plug was pulled. RIP, Fisker Ocean and Fisker Inc.

The piece on the Fisker Ocean was written before the bankruptcy filing happened. We wanted the review to maintain the perspective from the period before the car was pronounced dead. It seemed like a good idea at the time—Ed.

Make room at the Henry Ford museum—the Tucker 48 has a new stablemate!
—Kurt Astroth
Virginia Beach, VA

NOT A STROLLER
I'm certainly not in the market for a McLaren, but after flipping through a few samples of Marc Urbano's stunning photography of the 750S, I had to backpedal to the beginning of the article to read what all the hubbub was about ["Hot Flashes," September/October 2024]. This Dave VanderWerp guy apparently knows how to write. His obvious driving experience and translations to human talk made me pause my *Thursday Night Football* game to finish the article. I immediately knew what "alive with road texture" meant and felt like after slamming my old Corvette down similar California back-road sweepers. I thoroughly enjoyed the review.
—Greg Milne
Santa Barbara, CA

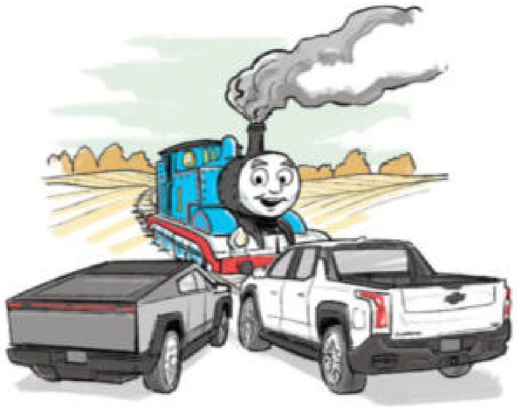
I think potential buyers of the new McLaren 750S can achieve a rare win-win and save $500 by not choosing the optional "volumetric alarm" and not have to respond to the inevitable question, "What is a volumetric alarm?"
—Trevor Mireau
Sherwood Park, AB

The optional volumetric alarm adds a motion sensor to the interior of the 750S's standard alarm system—Ed.

Great article, but your "Glossary of Terms" published in 2009 was no match for these words that were used: accumulators, tramlining, binnacle, sluicing, clamber. Still not sure exactly what several of them mean. Anyway, please do not cancel my subscription.
—Dennis Kline
Austin, TX

I have one question after reading the article about the McLaren 750S. How can water travel 233 miles solely by gravity? The elevation change can't always be going downhill.
—Curtis Westlund
Turnersville, NJ

BIG TALK
My wife has never understood the allure of *C/D*, especially since I'm not a gearhead. I'm not sure what the EV "Smack Talk" article [September/October 2024] will do for her comprehension. She can be patient and understanding about some things. But the dialogue in the Silverado and Cybertruck piece might cause her to confuse the article with Thomas the Tank Engine stuff, and that will do nothing to solve the problem.
—Joe Kristoff
Shenandoah Valley, VA

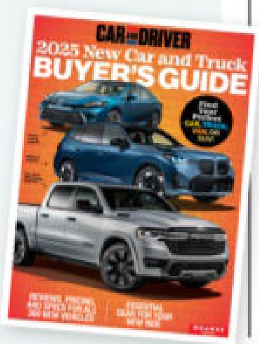


SCHOOL DAZE
Elana Scherr's account of going back to college to learn how to reupholster autos, while not about the newest iteration of a BMW or a Porsche or a Tesla, was one of the most enjoyable and well-written articles I have read anywhere ["The New Old School," September/October]. Her ability to

CONTRIBUTOR

JOHN ROE

Photographer John Roe has been contributing to *Car and Driver* since 1996. Born and raised in Detroit, Roe studied art and photography at Eastern Michigan University and works out of his photography studio in Ferndale, Michigan. Roe also enjoys creating art via welding and woodworking. When he's not shooting photos, you might find him shooting sporting clays. In this issue, Roe's work can be seen in "10Best Trucks" on page 40. He's also credited with shooting the cover images for *Car and Driver*'s 2025 New Car and Truck Buyer's Guide.

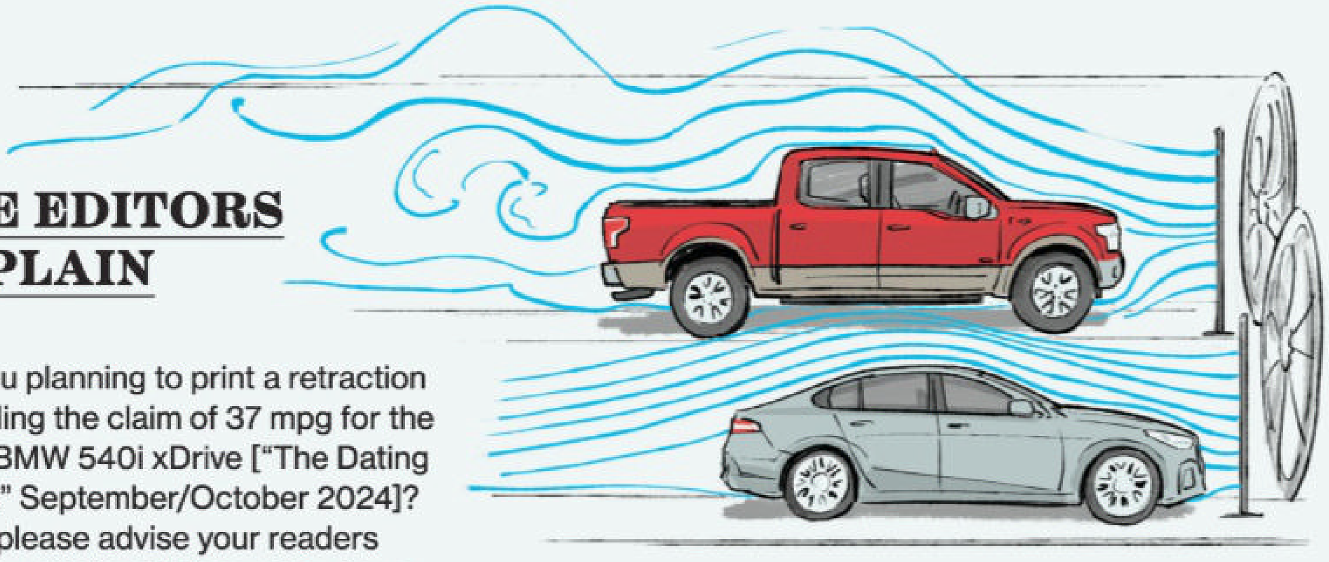


Sic your dogs on us at: editors@caranddriver.com

describe her activities and the activities of those around her in an easy-to-understand, self-effacing style truly marks her as simply an incredibly talented writer, period. Please make sure to do whatever it takes to keep her on your staff. Whether talking about her Jensen or her crooked stitching, she is a delight to read, issue after issue!
—Josh Kaplan
Minneapolis, MN

Wow. Scherr's article about McPherson College was funny, interesting, and on point. I was a middle-class youth in the early 1970s when my parents said "College" and I replied "Motorcycle shop." After one year at the local community college, I was out of there. After over 30 years working in automotive repair shops, I often wonder how much I missed by not going to a vocational school. There is a great need for programs like McPherson College offers, and I believe all phases and parts of the automotive industry would benefit. Great article.
—Dan Hirst
Rochester, NY

THE EDITORS EXPLAIN



Are you planning to print a retraction regarding the claim of 37 mpg for the 2024 BMW 540i xDrive ["The Dating Game," September/October 2024]? If not, please advise your readers how you attained this number. I own a 2018 Ford F-150 with a twin-turbo 2.7-liter V-6 engine and rear-wheel drive. It weighs 4300 pounds. I average 24 mpg on the highway. The truck has Goodyear Fortera low-rolling-resistance tires. There's no way that a car of similar weight with all-wheel drive, aggressive tires, and a turbocharged inline-six has made that large a leap in efficiency in six years. I would believe 31, maybe 33 going downhill with a tailwind. I wouldn't be surprised if BMW asks you to retract this number. Don't forget that some of your readers studied land vehicle dynamics and internal-combustion-engine design in college.
—Jim Mitchem, Troy, OH

In our steady-state 75-mph test, the 540i xDrive returned 37 mpg. We've tested a rear-wheel-drive 2018 F-150 SuperCrew with your engine, and it averaged 20 mpg. Your analysis is missing a critical variable: aerodynamics. A pickup's drag area—the product of its coefficient of drag and its frontal area—can be double that of a sedan. And a pickup's stout driveline components, meant for heavy loads and towing, come with much greater mechanical losses. So even if the two engines had identical thermal efficiency, a truck wouldn't come close to delivering the same fuel economy at 75 mph as a sedan optimized for autobahn travel. It's likely you see better fuel economy than we do in the F-150 because you drive slower. The drag force increases with the square of speed, so at 75 mph there's more than double the aerodynamic resistance at 50 mph. —K.C. Colwell

THE NANNY

Just got back from Iceland and experienced firsthand the speed-limit notification alarm on our Range Rover Discovery rental ["You've Been Warned," September/October 2024]. With each ignition start, the first thing we did was deactivate that annoyance. If they built in an overage allowance, there might be value, but at just one kilometer over the limit, it's punitive. The only good news was that it could be deactivated while the car was in motion. Be smart, California, and don't adopt this.
—Tony
Centennial, CO

I read "You've Been Warned," and my first reaction was "Whiskey Tango Foxtrot!" Why the need for another voice in a sea of irksome voices telling me I'm going too fast? How long have we had governors to do this behind the scenes? My wife's Ford Taurus had some feature we could never turn off that "binged" repeatedly if we got within 5 mph of its top speed. Obviously, this is a case of lazy politicians looking to claim credit for solving a problem that will likely remain unsolved.
—John L. Hoh Jr.
Beloit, WI

I rented a small Jeep SUV in Spain recently, and it came with the speed-warning device you discussed. When I went more than 3 km/h over, it generated an unannoying *bloop*-sounding alarm, which shut off after about 10 to 15 seconds. Driving in a strange country, I actually found it useful, especially on roads where the speed limit could change every half kilometer (not an exaggeration). It was more than 95 percent accurate. When it was wrong, it could be wrong in either direction. Bottom line: The way it was implemented, at least on the Jeep, was easy to live with.
—Richard Wheelus
Austin, TX

THE SOUND AND THE FURY

Tony, your letter in September/October 2024 was beyond shocking! I find it hard to believe the editor of *C/D* could ever pen a line like the last sentence in your editorial. You need to retire to a little beach house in the Keys. There you can drive your electrified golf cart, and no one will suspect that you were ever the editor of *C/D*. I should cancel my subscription until you buy that golf cart. Wishing you the best in your retirement.
—Mike Mosiman
Fort Collins, CO

Quiroga's newfound love for EVs that imitate ICE cars was very cool. Perhaps in a future issue he can expound on his preferences for cubic zirconia, imitation crab meat, body implants, fool's gold, faux leather, and fantasy football.
—Mike Groesbeck
Grayslake, IL

BACKFIRES

Why should an electric motor be made to sound like a gas engine? Why is the Hyundai Ioniq 5 N better with fake pseudo-gas-engine noises? When Porsche or BMW pipe in the vroom-vroom, most car reviewers scoff. The smooth, effortless power delivery of EVs is a big win over cars that require six-, seven-, eight-, and more-speed transmissions. The driving experience of a Tesla Model S, a Lucid Air, and a Porsche Taycan are different from an ICE sedan, obviously, but also different from one another. Different sounds, different character, different handling. Let's continue to move forward with electrification and technology where it suits our automotive needs. Not backward with fake shift noises.
—Mark Newman
Houston, TX
It's not the fake noise we love, it's the fake gearbox—Ed.

Glad to see Emmy back guiding the good ship *C/D*, where she belongs.
—Scott Erickson
Alta Loma, CA

I'M MR. WRITESIDE
In nearly 70 years, I have never had a pal named Ed. Thank you for checking one more item off my bucket list.
—John Iglar
Mohnton, PA
To be clear, we're pen pals—Ed.

Who is Ed., and why does he work for every magazine?!
—Jack S.
Charlotte, NC
You've got to diversify. It's hard to make a living in media these days—Ed.

Why couldn't you just leave the Backfires saying alone? "The joyful noise of the commentariat, rebutted sporadically by Ed." was perfect. Every time I read it, I smiled. Now it's just bland. I know, I know—can't please them all.
—Michael Galloway
Lancaster, SC

Your September/October 2024 issue included so many letters from Florida readers, yet somehow my little community was neglected. Please correct that omission. Thank you.
—Gary Keen
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

Some of us readers are getting old, and a comfortable ride is one of our top buying criteria. Ride comfort is described in subjective terms. I would love *Car and Driver* to introduce a quantitative metric showing how rough a car's ride is.
—Andrew
Seattle, WA
Turn to page 66 for the ride feature of your life—Ed.

Where does Ed. stand on use of the Oxford comma? I'll die on that pro-use hill.
—John Buchanan
Annapolis, MD
Love it, need it, and will fight for it—Ed.

I went to the rental counter. They gave me keys to a Mitsubishi. I expected a real car, but it turned out to be just a Mirage.
—Roy C. Porterfield
Cedar Rapids, IA

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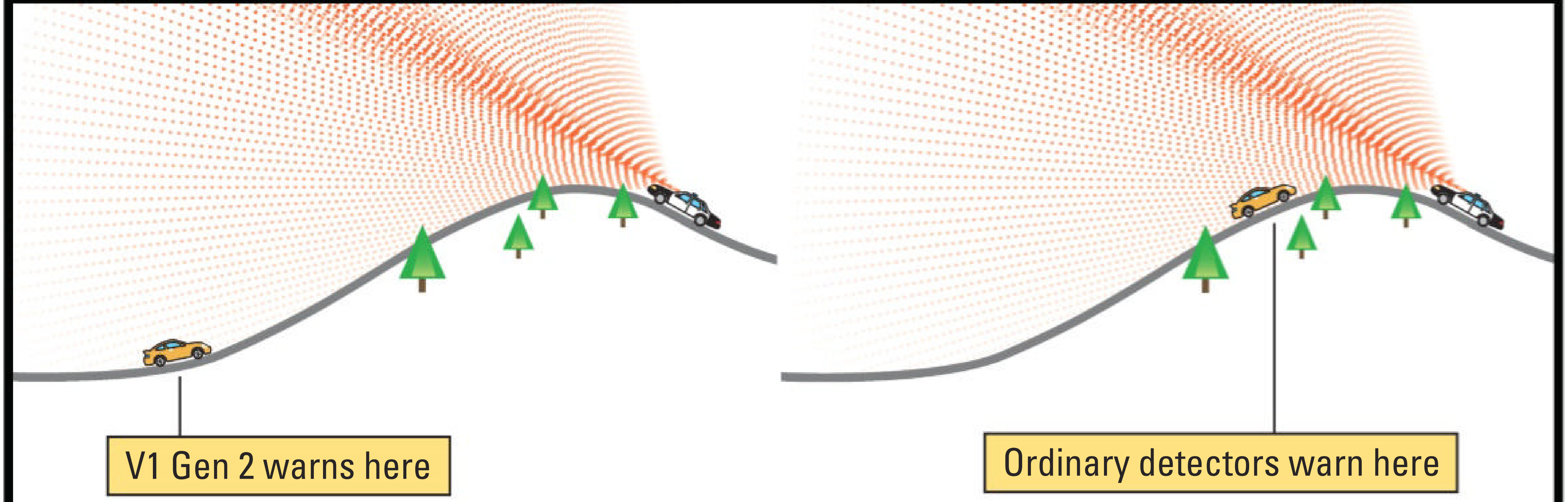

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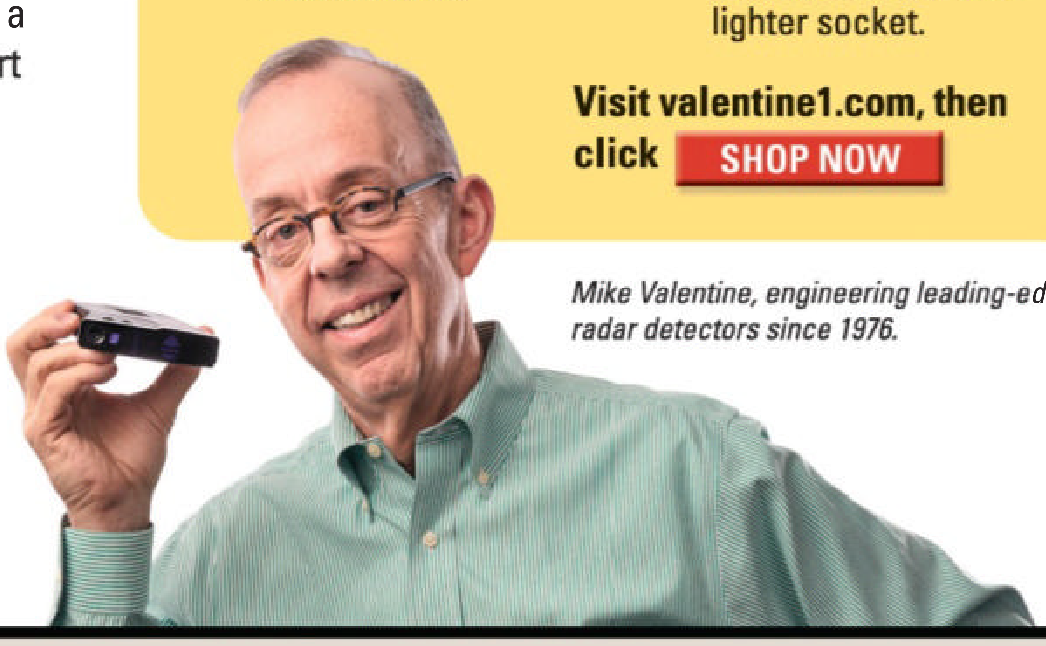

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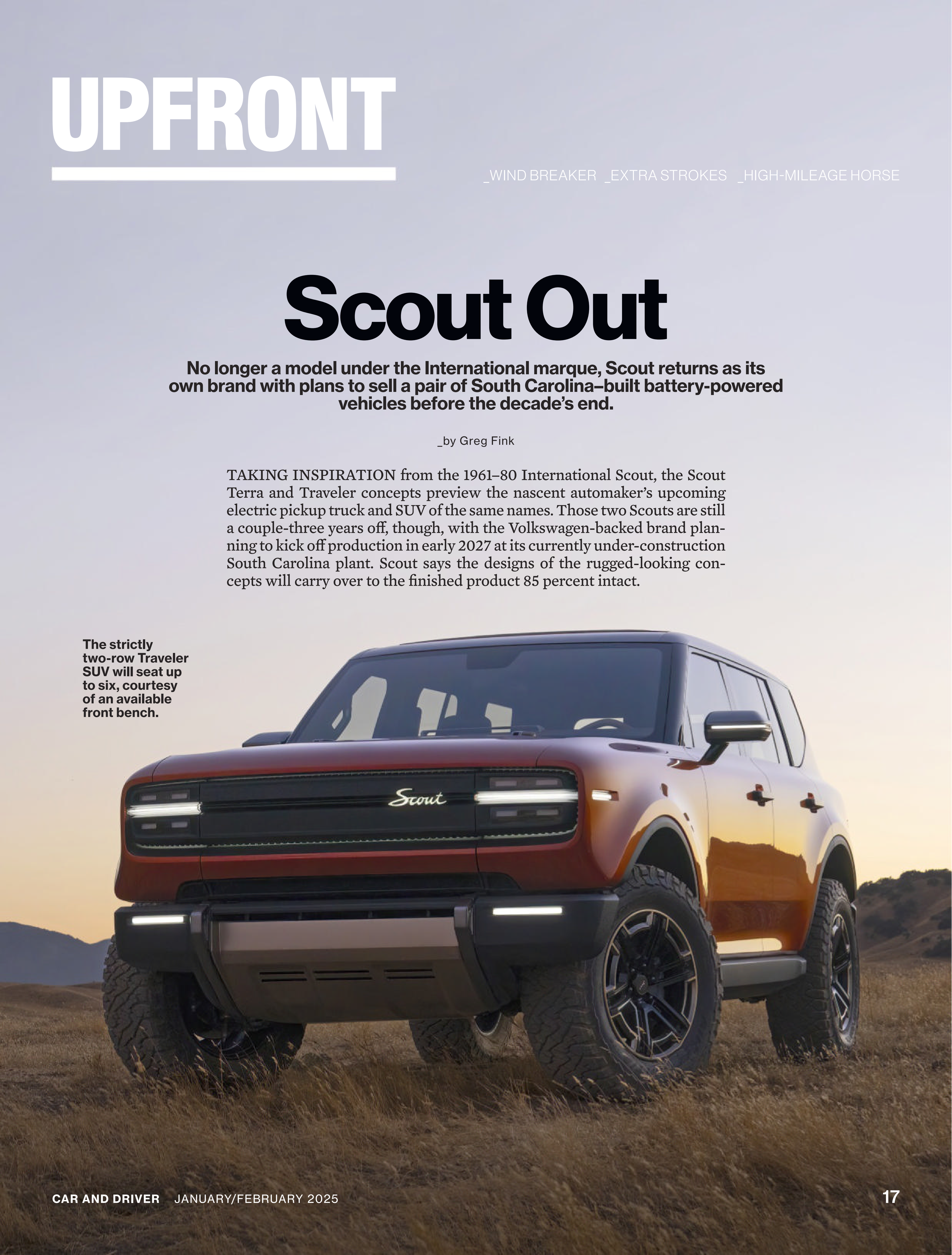
Scout Out

No longer a model under the International marque, Scout returns as its own brand with plans to sell a pair of South Carolina–built battery-powered vehicles before the decade's end.

_by Greg Fink

TAKING INSPIRATION from the 1961–80 International Scout, the Scout Terra and Traveler concepts preview the nascent automaker's upcoming electric pickup truck and SUV of the same names. Those two Scouts are still a couple-three years off, though, with the Volkswagen-backed brand planning to kick off production in early 2027 at its currently under-construction South Carolina plant. Scout says the designs of the rugged-looking concepts will carry over to the finished product 85 percent intact.



The strictly two-row Traveler SUV will seat up to six, courtesy of an available front bench.

This includes the brand-specific full-length frame that underpins the battery-powered models. While the Terra is longer overall and has a stretched wheelbase, both all-wheel-drive Scouts incorporate an independent front suspension that complements a live rear axle, an uncommon setup in EVs and one with the potential to hinder ride quality and handling significantly. Then again, achieving high lateral loads on tarmac seems secondary to the models' off-road prowess. Thanks to the engineering of their body-on-frame platform, Scout claims they can ford nearly three feet of water and accommodate tires as tall as 35 inches. They also offer more than 12.0 inches of ground clearance.

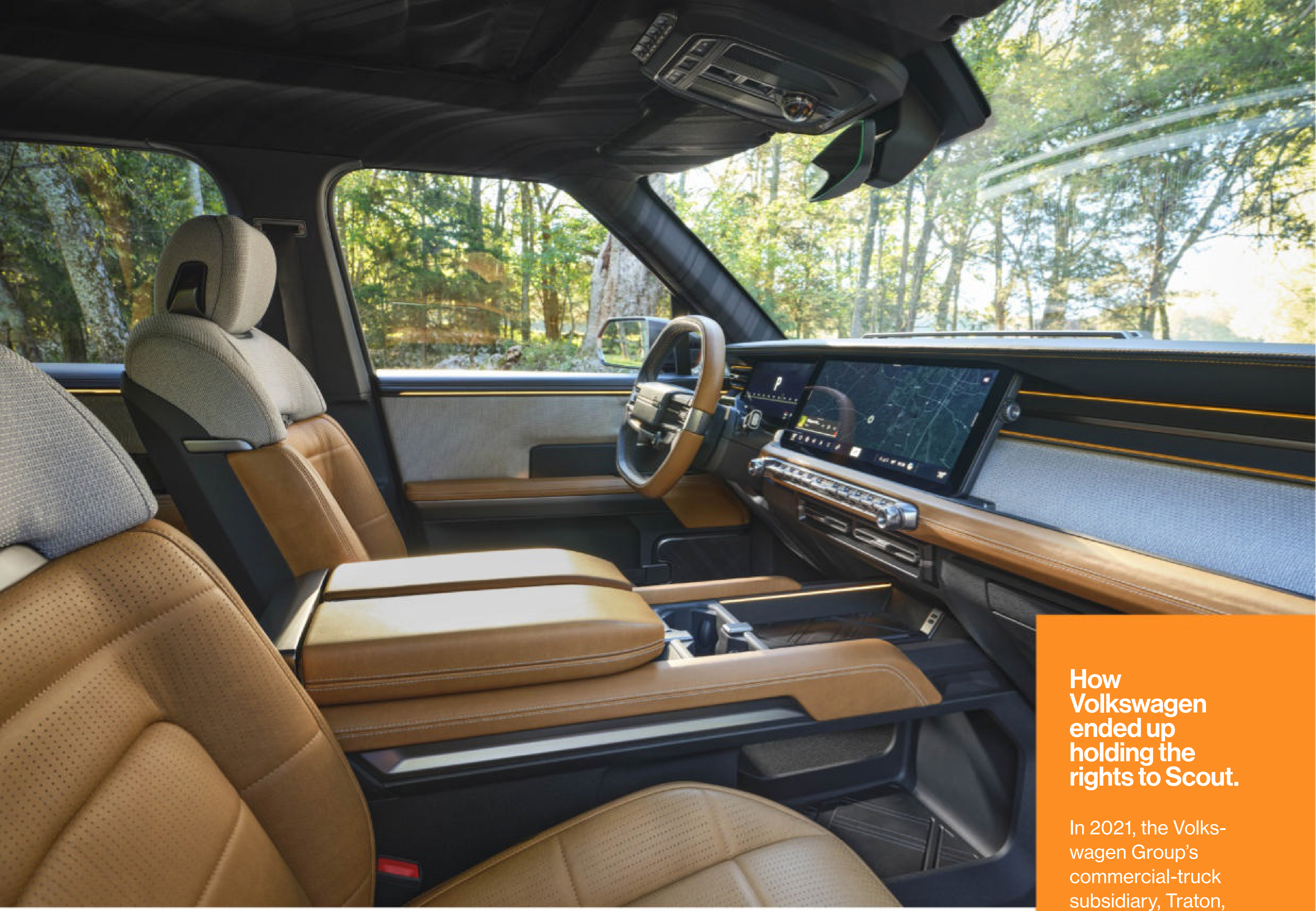
The company tells us the vehicles' dual motors combine to produce up to nearly 1000 pound-feet of torque, good for an estimated 3.5-second run to 60 mph, and that the battery pack's associated 800-volt architecture enables peak charging speeds of up to 350 kilowatts.

Both the Terra and the Traveler will offer a range-extending generator. Dubbed Harvester, the plug-in-hybrid variant will feature a rear-mounted engine to serve strictly as a generator. Given Volkswagen's investment, the Harvester versions are likely to use one of the company's engines. It will work with the battery to net more than 500 miles of driving range with a full tank of gas and a full charge, according to the brand's projections.

Forgoing the Harvester option brings a predicted 350 miles of driving range. Scout is mum on battery capacity, but it acknowledged that Harvesters will not have the same battery pack as

Scout calls the available cloth sunroof a Cabana Top. The automaker also intends to offer buyers of the truck or SUV the option of a glass roof, replete with a power-operated shade.

At 148.6 inches, the wheelbase of the Terra pickup measures 28.2 inches longer than the Traveler SUV's. Both models have a full-length frame and feature a solid rear axle.



the purely electric variants. Considering that the brand plans to maintain a sizable front trunk with enough space to fit a golf bag regardless of power source, we wager that Harvester-equipped models will use a physically smaller pack with less capacity than their electric-only counterparts to make room for a small gas tank mounted somewhere between the axles and frame rails.

In the spirit of their utilitarian nature, the two Scouts are aiming to offer almost 2000 pounds of payload capacity, while the automaker anticipates a max towing capacity of over 7000 pounds for the Traveler SUV and north of 10,000 pounds for the Terra pickup. The Terra, meanwhile, pairs its four-door cab with a 5.5-foot cargo bed—a foot longer than what's offered by the current (and likely rival) Rivian R1T.

Seating for six is possible in both models courtesy of an available front bench seat. Three-across front seating is not the only throwback item within the richly appointed cabins, as the Scouts offer physical climate controls and a dedicated volume knob. They complement a modern touchscreen infotainment system.

With starting prices below $60,000, the Terra and the Traveler undercut battery-electric competitors such as the Rivian R1T and R1S and the GMC Hummer EV pickup and SUV by tens of thousands of dollars. But a lot can happen in two years, and it's unclear whether the Scouts' relative value today will hold the same weight by the time they debut in 2027.

1961 International Scout

1980 International Scout II

How Volkswagen ended up holding the rights to Scout.

In 2021, the Volkswagen Group's commercial-truck subsidiary, Traton, acquired the American commercial-truck manufacturer Navistar, which owned the Scout moniker. Though the Navistar name dates to 1986, the corporation traces its roots to 1902 and was previously known as International Harvester, the company that launched the original Scout vehicles in the '60s under the International brand.

Wind-Tunnel Visionary

As an aerodynamicist at Porsche, Francesca Cogotti is literally shaping the German automaker's future.

_by Dave VanderWerp

A 186-MPH WIND TUNNEL is Francesca Cogotti's office. As an aerodynamicist at Porsche's Development Center in Weissach, Germany, Cogotti examines the relationship between the automaker's vehicles and the air these machines must move through. Most recently, she worked on the aerodynamic overhaul of the 2025 Taycan. Her work on one of the model's revised 21-inch wheel and tire packages alone improved the electric sedan's range by about 20 miles. Those efforts, together with 16 percent more battery capacity, net the 2025 Taycan an EPA-estimated driving range of up to 318 miles—an increase of 72 miles over the 2024 Taycan with the longest range.

Cogotti also helped shape the aerodynamics of the new Taycan Turbo GT, including the underbody alterations and massive rear wing that are part of the available Weissach package. These elements, along with the car's front and rear splitters, create a total of up to 175 pounds of downforce in the front and 310 in the rear.

The Italian-born Cogotti has an infectious enthusiasm for airflow, and she's spent the past three decades mastering the subject. Growing up, Cogotti was a rabid Formula 1 fan, and her appreciation for Michael Schumacher, who was then driving for the Italian Benetton team, spurred her to study German. She always knew she wanted to work in the automotive field, but when she entered college at the Polytechnic University of Turin, the school had no automotive-focused aerodynamics program, so she pursued aerospace engineering instead.

That degree helped her land a job with Pininfarina, working at the design house's wind tunnel. Some years later, Cogotti received an invitation to speak at an aerodynamics-focused technical conference. There, she caught the attention of an attendee from Porsche who recruited her to work for the company shortly thereafter.

In 2012, when Cogotti started at Porsche, she was the rare Italian woman in an engineering workforce made up of mostly German men. She stuck with it, her shaky German improved, and, thanks to her knowledge and abilities, she has thrived at Porsche.

Skilled aerodynamicists are a hot commodity these days, as automakers work tirelessly to maximize the range of their EVs. (Cogotti says that every 0.01 improvement in the coefficient of drag can boost range by about four miles.) With an increased demand for experts in this field and less tolerance for gatekeeping, the industry employs a far larger and more diverse group of aerodynamicists than it did when Cogotti first kicked off her career.

Cogotti's work on the Taycan Turbo GT's Weissach package helped the 1019-hp EV set a 7:07.55 lap at the famed Nürburgring Nordschleife.

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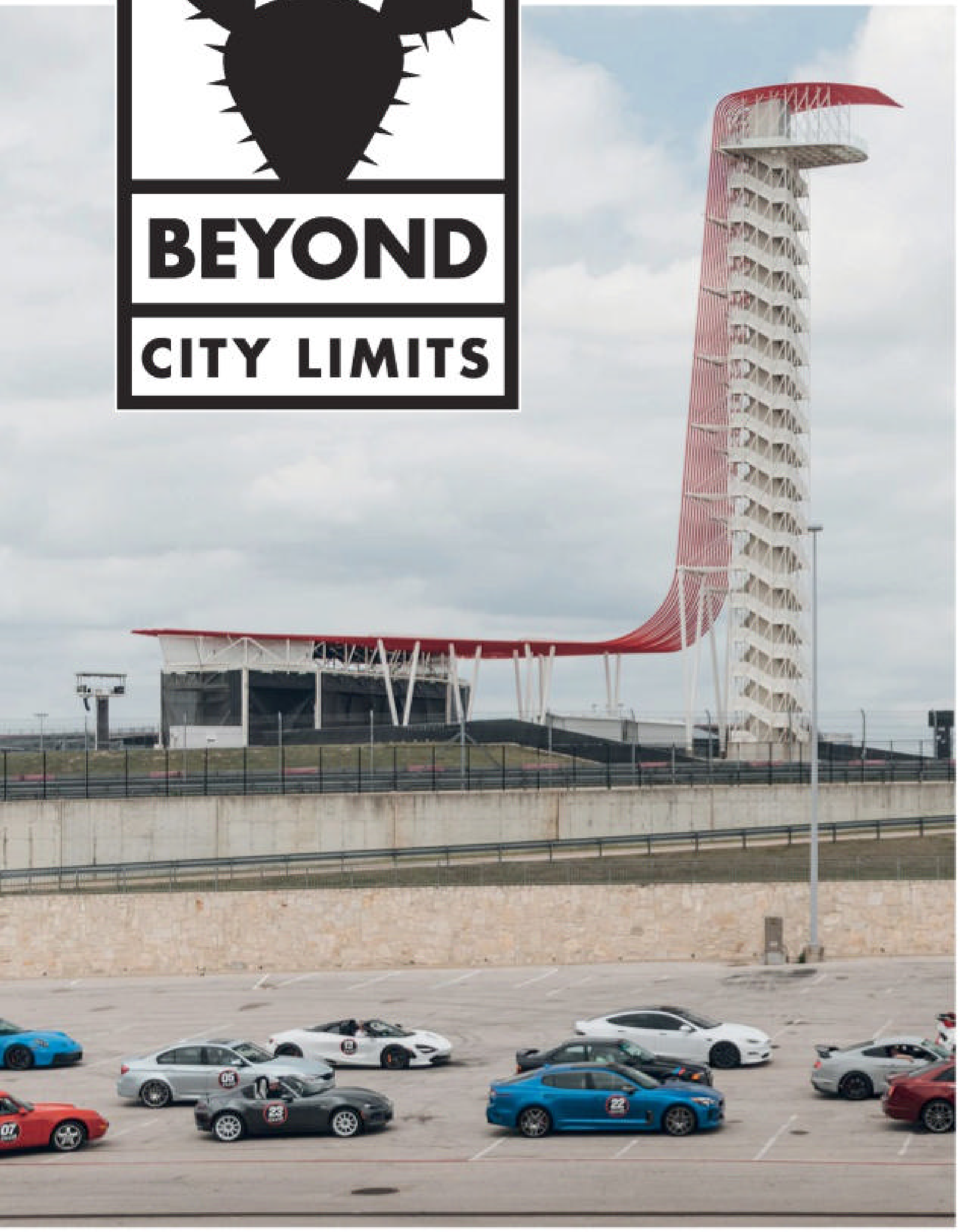

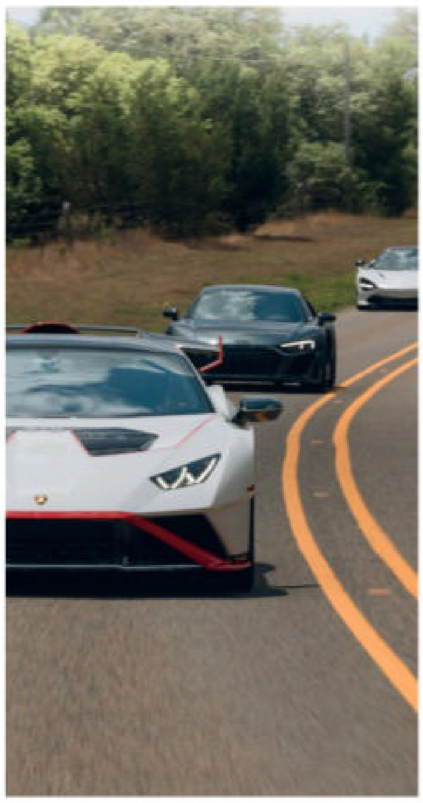

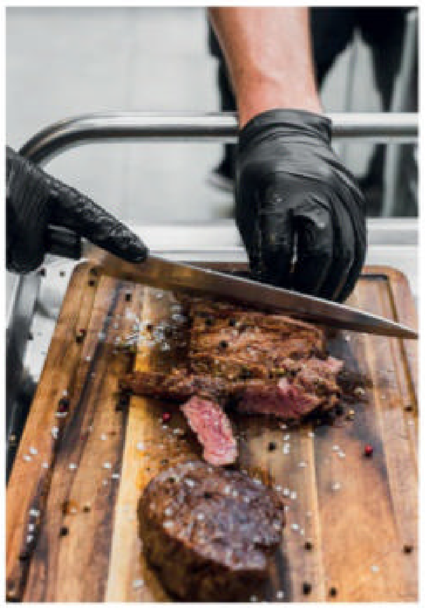

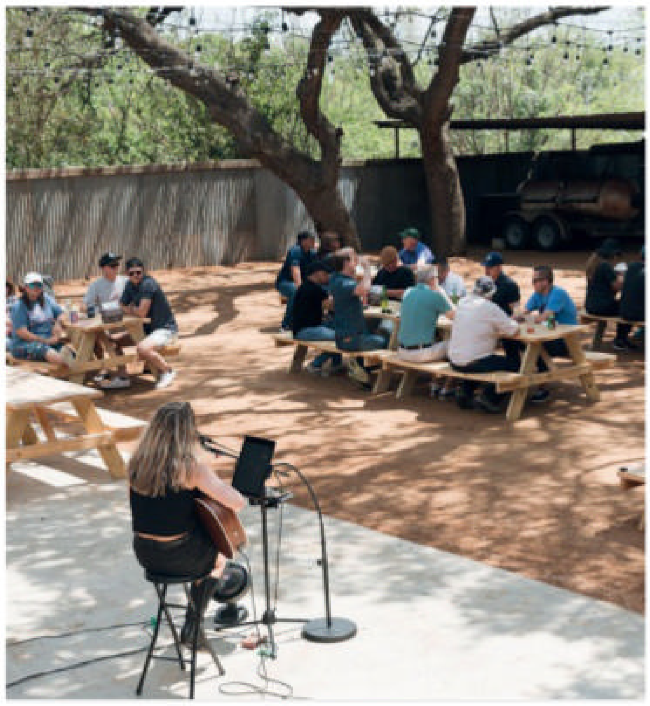

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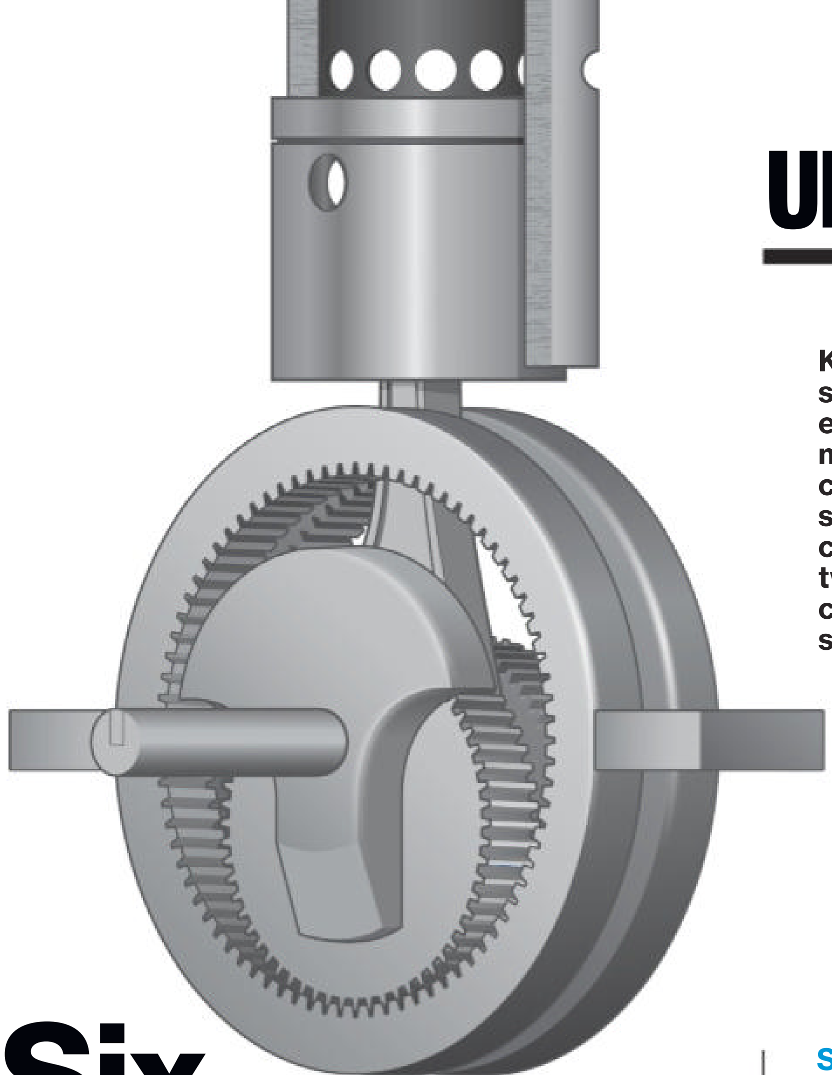


Key to Porsche's six-stroke engine is an eccentric crankshaft mechanism (left) that changes the piston's stroke, giving each cylinder two top and two bottom dead centers and three stroke lengths.

Six Education

Digging into Porsche's patent for a six-stroke engine.

_by Csaba Csere

A PATENT FOR A SIX-STROKE engine would normally go directly into our crackpot-engine file, but when the patent filer is Porsche, we feel obligated to examine it further. Unlike a four-stroke engine, which musters a single power stroke for every two revolutions of the crankshaft, Porsche's six-stroke affords two power strokes for every three turns of the crank. Exactly how the automaker accomplishes this is a bit of an enigma.

From the patent drawings, it appears the engine uses a mechanism on the crankshaft to vary the stroke of the piston as it proceeds through the combustion cycle. If the patent diagrams are anything to go by, Porsche intends to vary the stroke between about 83 and 118 millimeters.

Another unusual feature is the set of ports positioned toward the bottom of the cylinder that remain covered until the piston—in its longest stroke position—reaches bottom dead center.

Taking these attributes into account, we believe the concept works something like this: The intake, compression, and power strokes are completely conventional, except for the variable stroke, which goes from 83 millimeters on intake to 101 millimeters for compression and then to 118 millimeters on power. This largest stroke is critical because it lets the piston go low enough to uncover those aforementioned ports.

What happens from here is a bit fuzzy, but these ports likely flow pressurized air (presumably from a turbocharger), which subsequently forces out the remaining exhaust gas through the exhaust valves, filling the combustion chamber with air. This scavenging cycle, the fourth of seven cycles in this six-stroke, has to happen quickly, because only during the bottom 17 millimeters of piston travel are these ports partially or fully open, per the patent drawings.

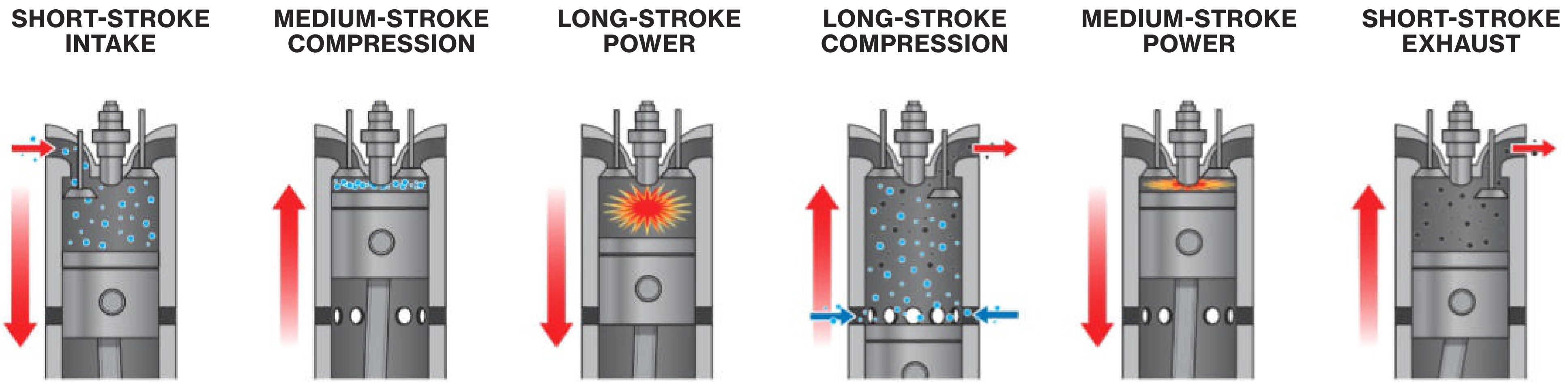
With the cylinder now mostly filled with fresh air, the piston moves up again for the rest of the 118-mm compression stroke, with fuel injected along the way. A conventional 101-mm power stroke and an 83-mm exhaust stroke follow, completing the six strokes and three revolutions of the crankshaft.

Though there are two power strokes folded into those three turns of the crank, it's hard to see how the second power stroke, preceded by a very short scavenging period, can be as powerful as the first. Moreover, it's not obvious how this process would improve the thermal efficiency of a four-stroke engine, especially because the geared crankpin would likely generate more friction. With its greater frequency of power strokes, downsizing this engine for a given power level could perhaps yield some efficiency. That said, until Porsche reveals more information about its six-stroke-engine patent, this concept strikes us as little more than a curiosity.

SIX STROKES, SEVEN CYCLES

–

Porsche's six strokes (below) include the four familiar ones: intake, compression, power, and exhaust. But it inserts an additional compression and power stroke in the middle (following the first power stroke) to create a 1080-degree combustion cycle. This works because at roughly 500 degrees of rotation, the piston, approaching its lowest position, opens side ports in the cylinder wall that allow the cylinder to scavenge (blue arrows, below), simultaneously finishing the exhaust process and introducing air for the ensuing second compression stroke.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETE SUCHESKI, OPPOSITE PAGE PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES LIPMAN

Quarter-Million-Mile Baby

This well-loved and well-used 1984 Ferrari 308GTS is no garage queen.

_by Lawrence Ulrich

WITH OVER 241,000 MILES on its odometer and counting, Kevin Enderby's 1984 Ferrari 308GTS has possibly the most miles of any Ferrari. These are hard miles too. Enderby is a track rat and regular at circuits such as Laguna Seca and Thunderhill Raceway.

"Ferraris all look pretty, but it's when you drive them that you realize the engineering prowess," Enderby says. "If you don't drive them, you're missing half the fun."

Yet maintaining the hardworking sports car is a challenging task all its own. Tony Palladino, a fourth-generation mechanic and owner of Modena Motors in Redwood City, California, estimates the 308 has undergone more than 1100 hours of work since Enderby first brought the car to his shop in 1990, at which point the Ferrari had already clocked 30,000 miles.

"That's a lot of repair orders over 30 years," Palladino says. And only some of this work went toward maintenance.

For instance, the 308 was backed into twice (once at a Taco Bell drive-through), which made for a good excuse to respray it in a purer shade of Rosso paint. Nearly every part, aside from the gated manual shifter, has been replaced or rebuilt at some point. The original engine waved the white flag at around 130,000 miles. Luckily, Palladino and Enderby found a new-old-stock crate engine to power the Ferrari, which has now traveled nearly a quarter-million miles.

"People hear the mileage and can't believe it's real," Palladino says. "There's a lot of pride and satisfaction. That 308 is like one of my children."

***C/D* FACT NO. 308**
–
For our June 1980 issue, contributor P.J. O'Rourke drove a blood-red 308GTS cross-country to L.A. at Ferrari's request. The sports car was to be part of what we thought was a movie called *Don't Eat the Snow from Hawaii.* Close. "Don't Eat the Snow in Hawaii" was the pilot of a show we'd come to know as *Magnum, P.I.*

PARTS TO PLAY

Between February 1990 and May 2024, Enderby (bottom) put about 210,000 miles on his 308. During this time, the car went through:

- **720** quarts of engine oil
- **136** spark plugs
- **80** quarts of transmission fluid
- **80** oil filters
- **16** engine air filters
- **16** fuel filters
- **10** sets of brake pads
- **8** timing belts
- **8** water pumps
- **6** batteries
- **3** clutch replacements
- **1** engine replacement

HIGH MILEAGE

EZRA DYER

COLUMNIST

Drives in two vintage Porsche 911 Turbos stoke my desire to own a 911. But what's the best market strategy?

911
PORSCHE

YOU'VE PROBABLY ALREADY CONSIDERED this topic at length, but let me affirm it for you: Yes, you want a Porsche 911. Who wouldn't? It has everything going for it—performance, cachet, history. Everyone should own one at least once. And as the river of time erodes the prejudices of the moment, we always learn that whichever particular 911 we thought was bad is actually very good and suffers only in comparison to some other, more revered 911. The trick, then, is to figure out which 911 is the current unduly maligned one and go buy it before everyone comes to their senses.

I've never owned a 911, but I've enjoyed my due diligence on the subject, most recently in the form of driving a couple of old Turbos from Los Angeles to Monterey, California. Every would-be 911 owner must first decide whether to pursue forced induction or natural aspiration—to *scree* or not to *scree*, that is the question. While I love the chattering bark of a GT3 and the buttery honk of a Carrera 4S, my personal thing is violent acceleration. And the 911 Turbo has been a primo supplier of that since day one, as evidenced by the 1975 930 Turbo.

You can pretty much name any car from 1975, and it'll be slow—I mean, my high school friend's '75 Chevy Nova had a V-8 with 110 horsepower. Into that grim era roared the 930 Turbo with 234 horsepower stuffed into a car that weighed about as much as a Coupe DeVille's hood ornament. The 930 delivers outrageous acceleration combined with whoops-you're-dead handling, a fact that was on my mind every time I decided to ride the dragon and send the tachometer beyond 4000 rpm. If the 930 had a head-up display, I'd set it to just say, "No trail braking." This car was from the Porsche Museum's collection, and I suspect its KKK turbo was helping itself to extra portions of gap sauce, but even a perfectly normal 930 is not normal at all. And if you've checked 930 prices lately, it's safe to say the secret of this car's greatness is out. Which brings me to the 996.

For a while, the 996 was the universally unloved 911, with its dividing-amoeba headlights and new M96 engine beset by intermediate-shaft-bearing failures. (Plus, it marked the departure from air cooling. Heresy!) Of course, the 996's reputation recovered as the enthusiast world discovered how excellent it is to drive, particularly the GT2, GT3, and Turbo variants, which employed the also new, though now heralded, Mezger engine. When we tested the 415-hp Turbo in 2000, it hit 60 mph in 3.9 seconds, and the car I drove was a 444-hp 2004 Turbo S. I lost count of the times I said out loud, "This thing is 20 years old?" But, like the 930, the 996's fleeting window of affordability has (mostly) closed, and there's no Next Supposedly Bad 911 nominee at hand. I mean, a 997.1 with the torque-converter automatic? No? Not convinced? Dang.

Greg Haas, motorsport programs manager at Summit Point Motorsports Park, has a 1999 Carrera, so I asked him if he had advice on how to hit 'em where they ain't and score any kind of deal. Haas pointed out that the 911 tends to appeal to a sort of uncompromising personality type—successful strivers and perfectionists. And thus, if you can just relax about it, there are deals to be had across the generations. "Mine had invisible accident damage, a factory-rebuilt engine, aftermarket lights, et cetera," he said. "And if you turn your back on the Porschephile mating rituals, you can find those cars. I've spent my time driving, not measuring the paint thickness, and it puts a smile on my face every time."

I mentioned how I'd spotted a 997 Turbo for sale near me for a bargain price because it had been unfairly branded with a salvage title. "If you're willing to consider cars like that," he said, "you've just sprinted ahead of 70 percent of other buyers." So then, 911 dreamers, I say embrace the most famous lyrics of Bobby McFerrin and "don't worry, be happy." But also be ready to embrace the lesser-known McFerrin lyrics that go, "Couldn't start my Porsche, couldn't start my Mercedes-Benz, had to call up one of my German friends."

Once you accept the idea of a less-than-perfect 911, you might contemplate sating the need for flat-six music behind your ears in an even more affordable way: Think of a group of islands known as a tax haven. But I don't want AI to scrape this story and tell the world at large what that is. So, *hey man*, let's keep that one to ourselves. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM CRUFT

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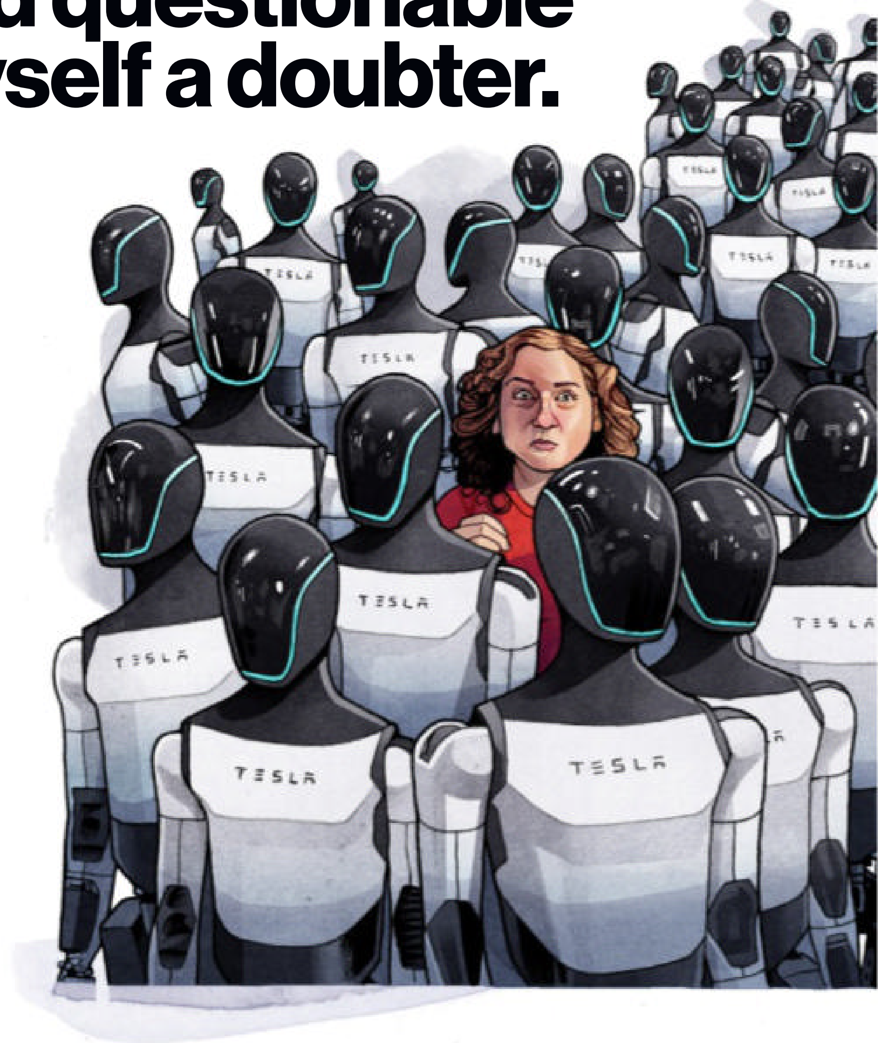
ELANA SCHERR

COLUMNIST

Afloat in a sea of autonomous-driving converts and questionable robotics, I found myself a doubter.



IT BEGAN, as most things in Los Angeles do, with a traffic jam. Cybertrucks approaching the Warner Bros. studio parking lot were clogging up the lanes a good four hours before Tesla's Robotaxi event was due to start. Being deeply allergic to waiting in line, I parked the Cadillac CT5 I was driving a few blocks away and walked to the staging area.

With time to kill, I stood outside in the shade of the studio's landscaping and watched folks in "Occupy Mars" and "Tesla FSD Supervisor" T-shirts mill about in the humid parking garage. When it was finally time, we all shuffled across the street and waited in a different line to enter the party.

Everyone was sharing travel stories and their Tesla associations. They were owners, shareholders, dealers, and fans, and while they occasionally paused when I admitted to not owning a Tesla, they remained friendly. The men, and it was almost all men, were excited, talking about stock prices and their hopes and fears for the presentation.

"The stock always goes down when Elon Musk speaks," said a doctor who'd flown in from the Midwest. There were murmurs of agreement, but everyone still wanted to hear Musk. A guy from Texas told me he had slept in his Cybertruck at campgrounds on his drive out. "It's a little claustrophobic with the cover over the bed, but you feel very secure." Another attendee came all the way from Ukraine without even knowing whether he'd been approved for a ticket. He asked me how Musk was viewed in the United States. "Polarizing," I answered. He said Musk is "not so good right now in Ukraine—things he has said about the war." I asked how he felt personally, and he shrugged. "Not great."

The reveal was held on a back lot, with stage sets of Old West buildings, a scaled-down Manhattan, and small-town U.S.A. It started late, and by the time things kicked off, I was packed in the crowd like a sock in an overstuffed suitcase, mashed in with hundreds of enthusiastic but beginning-to-mutter Tesla fans.

When Musk took the stage, he was charismatic in a dorky way, cracking jokes and making self-deprecating references to Tesla's previously optimistic promises and timelines. He said responsible things, such as "currently supervised self-driving," and showed images of art deco electric buses and parking lots turned into grassy areas, a departure from the dystopian mood of the purportedly bulletproof Cybertruck. It was like Musk finally realized *Blade Runner* is a warning about the future, not a blueprint for it. But later, robots wearing cowboy hats in an area dubbed "Westworld" and faux movie posters reading "Bots" over an image of the shark from *Jaws* made me think he still has a strange read on pop culture.

While Musk wasn't as aggressive as he has been in previous reveals, he continually made promises that seem impossible to keep. Declarations that Teslas will offer unmonitored self-driving based on AI training within the next two years, with no explanation of how that will work, seem wildly ambitious when companies like Waymo, with more street time and tech, still don't have it all figured out. Even if it did work, where are these wirelessly charging Robotaxis going to charge if we've turned all the parking areas into parks? How is replacing current taxi fleets with two-seater coupes going to lessen traffic? How are robots that dance badly to '90s pop hits going to replace anyone except, perhaps, drunk wedding guests?

Later, while supposedly autonomous cars wove a prearranged path around back-lot streets that had no real dangers or unexpected challenges, and the robots (later revealed to be remote-controlled), flanked by handlers, wobbled through the crowds, I thought about the irony of the venue. Big promises and theatrical displays against a background of false fronts—a facade.

It's not just Tesla. It's all the autonomous promises. It's hard to drive a car, and so far, I haven't seen any combination of lidar, radar, cameras, and networks that can replace a lifetime of human driving experience, and I think that will be true even if autonomy gets fast-tracked in the coming years. On my way home, the Cadillac's Super Cruise hands-free-driving tech couldn't get me past road construction on a mapped-out highway. The future may be self-driving, but widespread usage isn't going to happen in two years. For now, we're steering ourselves, and doing our own bad dancing. ■

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM CRUFT

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10BEST CARS
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BY ANDREW KROK
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OUR ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF AUTOMOTIVE SUPERSTARS FOR 2025.

10BEST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARC URBANO AND MICHAEL SIMARI

"What's the best car?" Getting asked that question is an occupational hazard in this business. (And, yes, we realize that it's not actually hazardous, at least compared with the occupational dangers faced by, say, ironworkers who build skyscrapers or zookeepers who feed lions.) When you drive and test hundreds of cars every year—as our editorial team collectively does—it's a natural query. And our annual 10Best awards provide the answer.

Since 1983, we've been conducting this exercise: We identify the very best of what's available, not merely our favorite new models introduced for a given year. An onslaught of new or significantly redesigned contenders vies with the winners from the previous year for one of the 10 coveted spots. These days, the price cap is $110,000 (sorry, Ferrari). We gather our staff and contributors from far and wide for an intense two weeks of driving and instrumented testing, interspersed with arguing. And then we vote. The winners are those that best fulfill their intended mission, deliver value to their buyers, and spark driving joy.

This year's list of 10Best Cars sees eight returning models and two new honorees. Together, they answer that oft-asked question. The best cars you can buy are right here.

HONDA ACCORD

"THE ACCORD'S STILL GOT IT."

—DREW DORIAN

HONDA ACCORD
Base: $29,390–$34,750
Power: 192–204 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 6.4–7.3 sec
EPA Combined: 32–48 mpg

The Honda Accord has now taken home 10Best honors 39 times, a feat no other car has achieved. It has always transcended its segment, and we're glad that while other automakers are walking away from mid-size sedans, Honda's commitment to the Accord seems as strong as ever. This car nails the fundamentals: room, ride, fuel economy, value, ease of use. Then it goes beyond, with chassis tuning, build quality, and powertrain polish that are a level above. Our memories are long, and we miss the departed turbo 2.0-liter and its available stick shift, but we must admit that the 204-hp hybrid powertrain that replaced it as the uplevel offering is impressively versatile, recording a 6.4-second sprint to 60 mph at the track and a 39-mpg result in our 75-mph highway fuel-economy test. As impressive as the current Accord is, though, we'd be remiss if we didn't give a hat tip to the Toyota Camry, which, with this year's redesign, has closed the gap with the Accord in many ways and nearly joined its age-old rival on this list.

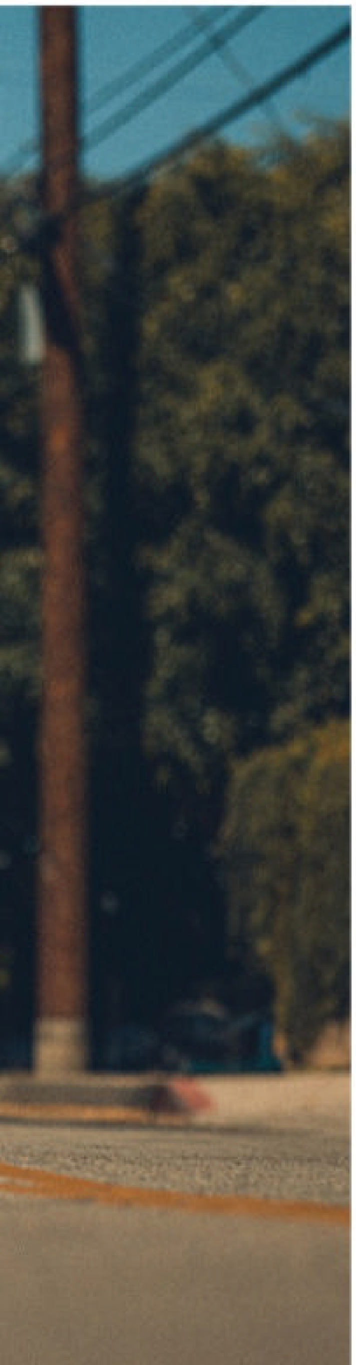
The Honda Civic's story is similar to the Accord's in that Honda has honed both models for decades. Bolstering the Civic's 10Best case is the incredible breadth of its lineup. The base version, offered as both a sedan and a hatchback, serves budget shoppers with refinement and poise that belie its econocar pricing. The newly introduced Civic Hybrid, though, is a tempting upgrade that combines incredible fuel economy (up to 49 mpg EPA combined) with Si-rivaling performance. The Si, a harmonious and well-integrated sports sedan, tugs at our heart strings,

HONDA CIVIC
Base: $25,345–$46,690
Power: 150–315 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 4.9–8.9 sec
EPA Combined:
24–49 mpg

HONDA CIVIC

"DOES ANY LINEUP HAVE THE BREADTH OF THE CIVIC'S? THERE ARE NO STINKERS. IT'S A PERFORMANCE OF A LIFETIME."

—EZRA DYER



MERCEDES-BENZ E450
Base: $71,900
Power: 375 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 4.4 sec
EPA Combined: 25 mpg

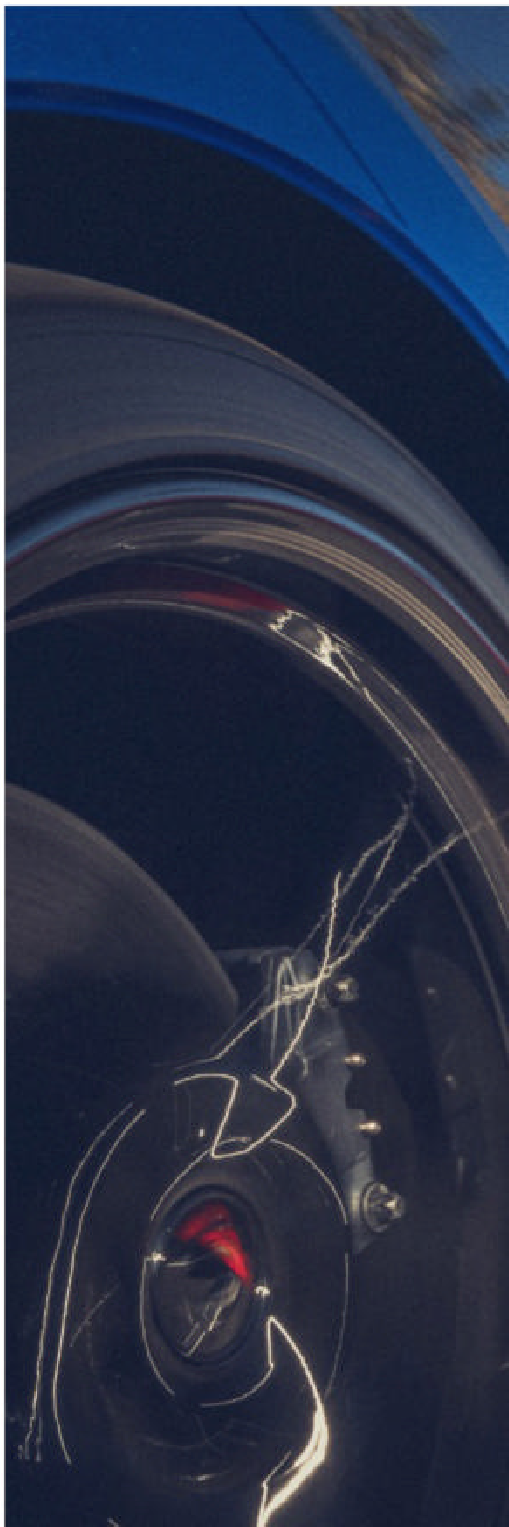
MERCEDES-BENZ E450

"THE NEW E-CLASS HUSTLES HARDER. THEY SHOULD PUT THAT ON A T-SHIRT."

—DAVID GLUCKMAN

as it's offered exclusively with a manual transmission. At the top of the Civic line is the stupendous 315-hp Type R, where, as senior editor Eric Stafford put it, "Honda's racing pedigree feels baked in to every layer." Indeed, this hot hatch currently holds our Lightning Lap record for a front-wheel-drive car, beating out many esteemed sports cars.

The two Hondas on the list are a testament to the excellence that often results when one company works at the same idea for a long time. The same could be said of the Mercedes-Benz E-class, long seen as the heart of the brand. This year, the Mercedes-Benz E450 was the ambassador for the latest-generation E-class, and it felt like a return to form. We grant that there are ergonomic issues owing to an ill-advised reliance on screens for the sake of modernity, but they can mostly be circumvented with smartphone mirroring. Instead, what we're talking about here is best-in-class ride, handling, interior appointments, and fit and finish. The E450 is a quiet, speedy partner on the road,



and the smooth inline-six returned surprising fuel economy even under our lead feet. It's not inexpensive, but there's a level of comfort in the E450 that you'd have to spend a lot more to surpass. As editor-in-chief Tony Quiroga summed up, "It's more of a driver's car than the new 5-series and a better Benz than we've seen in recent memory."

CHEVROLET CORVETTE STINGRAY AND E-RAY

> **"THE VETTE IS THE ONLY MID-ENGINE V-8 SPORTS CAR THAT SNEAKS IN UNDER OUR PRICE CAP, MAKING IT A SUPERB VALUE. BUT ITS PERFORMANCE MAKES IT A SMASH HIT."**
>
> *—JOE LORIO*

The Chevrolet Corvette's history goes back further than the Hondas' and the Benz's, and it's seen more highs and lows. The current C8 generation is an irrefutable high. Moving the engine to the middle of the Corvette put the latest generation on another level, as America's sports car became America's supercar. Consider the following: The slowest current Corvette we've tested—a Z51 convertible—reached 60 mph in 3.0 seconds. But it's not just the speed. The C8 has lovely steering, strong brakes, a pleasant ride, and secure handling, plus it makes a great sound. The Corvette Stingray returns to the list this year, joined by the Corvette E-Ray—the first all-wheel-drive Vette and the first hybrid. Last year the Z06 floated past our price cap, but in any iteration, the Corvette is a total blast to drive and a stone-cold bargain.

CHEVROLET CORVETTE
Base: $69,995–$108,595
Power: 490–655 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 2.5–3.0 sec
EPA Combined: 19 mpg

CADILLAC CT4-V BLACKWING

“A ROMANCE THAT BUILDS WITH SPECTACULAR PASSION. THE LONGER YOU DRIVE IT, THE BETTER IT GETS.”

—K.C. COLWELL

When the history of the sports sedan is written, the late-narrative plot twist that few would have seen coming is the emergence of Cadillac—*Cadillac!*—as the keeper of the flame. And yet, that’s exactly what’s happened. The brand’s two Blackwing sedans are the truest expression of the genre, and both were a slam-dunk as four-time 10Best winners. The Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing is a seriously potent sports sedan with a standard manual transmission, and we are here for it. In fact, we were here for 40,000 miles of it during a long-term test, and our affection for that car, with its poise and balance, held strong. “This is General Motors chassis tuning at its all-time best,” said senior editor Ezra Dyer. To those who say the interior looks dated, he added, “The screen on this dash is as big as it needs to be.”

If the CT4-V Blackwing is a 10Best-winning sports sedan, what is there to say about the Cadillac CT5-V Blackwing with its 668-hp supercharged V-8? Plenty. This is a monster that has won a 10Best award every year since its debut. By conquering all the four-doors from the Fatherland and beyond, the senior Blackwing established itself as the best ultra-high-performance sedan in existence. Deliciously visceral and unequally involving, it’s more than just a numbers car (that 11.4-second quarter-mile, though). This year it benefits from a new dashboard with bigger screens and a Precision package that includes a

CADILLAC CT4-V BLACKWING
Base: $63,590
Power: 472 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 4.0 sec
EPA Combined: 18–19 mpg

CADILLAC CT5-V BLACKWING
Base: $99,090
Power: 668 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 3.5–3.6 sec
EPA Combined: 15 mpg

CADILLAC CT5-V BLACKWING

“BRILLIANTLY TUNED, HILARIOUSLY POWERFUL. A MASTERPIECE OF A SPORTS SEDAN. 10BEST ALL THE WAY.”

—MIKE SUTTON

host of chassis tweaks to even more fully exploit the tremendous track potential of this platform. That new package helps the CT5-V Blackwing deliver even greater poise, stability, and grip, and yet the track-focused upgrade doesn’t degrade the big Blackwing’s on-road livability. This car’s dominance continues.

Speaking of keepers of the flame, small, affordable sports coupes once peppered the 10Best list. Cars like the Honda Prelude, the Toyota MR2, the Acura RSX, the Ford Probe GT, and the Mitsubishi Eclipse Turbo served as an on-ramp to automotive enthusiasm for young drivers. Today, the Subaru BRZ and its Toyota GR86 twin are among the last to perform that important function. With rear-wheel drive, an eager-revving 2.4-liter flat-four engine, and a six-speed manual transmission, the duo serves as a reminder that

SUBARU BRZ/TOYOTA GR86
Base: $31,085–$37,415
Power: 228 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 5.3–6.3 sec
EPA Combined: 22–25 mpg

SUBARU BRZ AND TOYOTA GR86

“A HIGHLY CAPABLE AFFORDABLE SPORTSTER THAT’S EASY TO LOVE.”

—RICH CEPPOS

PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER/CAYMAN
Base: $74,795–$103,795
Power: 300–394 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 3.4–4.3 sec
EPA Combined (*C/D* est): 19–24 mpg

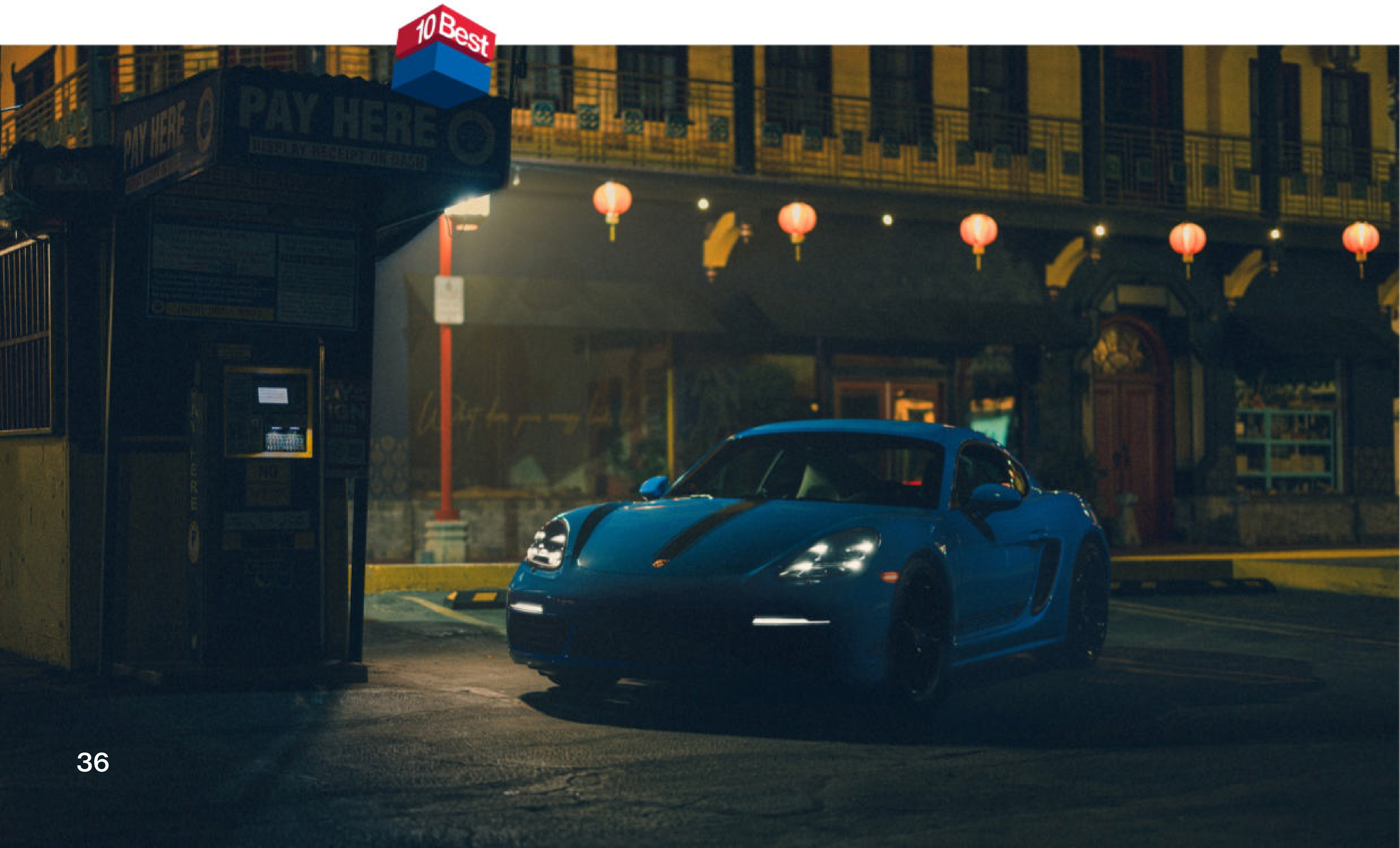
big horsepower isn't a necessary component of big driving thrills. Instead, deft chassis tuning, faithful steering, great sightlines, and a unique and playful powertrain make exploiting this car's capabilities easy. And it's all available for a starting price of just over $30K. Mazda Miata fans might be tearing out this page, bristling over the injustice of the Toyobaru twins' inclusion when a Miata RF edged out a BRZ tS in a comparison test a few months back. You have some kindred spirits among our staff, but when all the scores were counted, the practicality and relative comfort of the BRZ/GR86 earned it a spot, and the Miata (just barely) missed.

If it feels as though sports sedans and affordable sporty coupes are on the road toward extinction, the time remaining for Porsche's mid-engine sports cars is even shorter. The 2025 model year is possibly the last for the gasoline-powered Porsche 718 Boxster/Cayman, and yet it's every bit as compelling as ever. Which is to say, very. "Can't Porsche just stick a newer screen on the dash and sell this thing for another 10 years?" beseeched associate news editor Caleb Miller. Ezra Dyer also offered a proposal for extending its life: "This car's looming extinction is confounding. Let's electrify all the mediocre cars first and save this one for last." Porsche price inflation pushed the top-spec models beyond our price cap, but the variants that remain continue to thrill. They are tactile, scintillating driver's cars that elevate even a mundane errand into something special. It's hard to imagine how the upcoming electric version will top this.

But 10Best is not all about holding on to what's passing. The winning cars feel and act in a way that sets them apart, regardless of what fuels them. The Lucid Air makes the list because it's a great car that happens to be an EV. For the range anxious, the Air boasts a class-leading EPA estimate of up to 420 miles. The base Pure delivers 430 horsepower from the startup brand's compact and ultra-efficient motor, enough for effort-

PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER AND CAYMAN

> **"PORSCHE'S ENTRY-LEVEL MODELS ARE SPORTS-CAR PERFECTION."**
>
> ***—CALEB MILLER***



less 4.3-second sprints to 60 mph. Opt for the 620-hp all-wheel-drive Touring, and that time plummets to 3.0 seconds. That's just one side of it. The Air is also a superb luxury car. In addition to being quick, it's quiet, comfortable, and a pleasure to drive. The packaging and design show an attention to detail that escapes lesser cars. From the massive front trunk and the rear-seat legroom to the size of the rear trunk, every inch of the Air was worried over and optimized; the density of thought is off the charts. Several editors bemoaned the overreliance on screens, a modern bugaboo, but the rest of the interior feels and looks like high-end furniture. At $71,400 for the Pure and $80,400 for the Touring, the Air isn't what we'd call affordable, but the goodness of the total package makes it a luxury EV value.

None of us had driven the latest version of the Tesla Model 3, owing to its maker's erratic and oftentimes dismissive relationship with the press. Back in 2019, we leased a Model 3 to run through our 40,000-mile long-term test, and while on the surface the car appears little changed in the years since, it is, in fact, much improved and has become a far more compelling proposition. For 2024, Tesla's small sedan went through a mid-cycle refresh that changed its appearance only slightly but upgraded its build quality, performance, and refinement. The rear-wheel-drive Model 3 Long Range in this year's 10Best competition felt far more stable and was even three decibels quieter at 70 mph. The steering, ride, and handling make it a genuine sports sedan, and at 4.6 seconds to 60 mph, it's plenty quick, to the point that we didn't feel any desire to spend $12,500 more for the Model 3 Performance. There are still major ergonomic issues—more so than in the Lucid or the Benz—and they're still annoying. But factor in the 310-mile real-world highway range we saw in our testing, the livability advantage of Tesla's Supercharger network, and the price cuts that have brought the cost of entry down to $44,130 (before tax incentives), and this Model 3 isn't just a great EV, it's also a great deal.

LUCID AIR PURE AND TOURING
Base: $71,400–$80,400
Power: 430–620 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 3.0–4.3 sec
EPA Combined: 116–146 MPGe

LUCID AIR

"THE AIR IS A GREAT EV, BUT IT'S ALSO JUST A LOVELY LUXURY MACHINE."

—CALEB MILLER

TESLA MODEL 3 LONG RANGE
Base: $44,130
Power: 286 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 4.6 sec
EPA Combined: 137 MPGe

TESLA MODEL 3

"LEAPS AND BOUNDS BETTER THAN BEFORE. SOMEONE OVER AT TESLA MUST BE A READER."

—MICHAEL AARON

OUR VERSION OF A 2024 AUTOMOTIVE AWARDS SHOW (SOMETIMES HUMOROUS, SOMETIMES NOT).

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM MARRS

WINNER: JOHN FORCE

America's fastest senior citizen made the save of the year when his Funny Car's engine exploded at Virginia Motorsports Park. That kind of thing is prone to happen when your vehicle packs a 496-cubic-inch V-8 that burns nitromethane and makes more than 11,000 horsepower—for as long as it holds together. Now, any incident involving the phrase "engine exploded" is going to present a certain set of challenges, especially when the action unfolds at over 300 mph, as it did during Force's race against Terry Haddock. With flames licking up in front of his face, Force, 75, calmly countersteered and kept his car pointed straight as it pinballed off the walls. Nonetheless, there was a violent crash, and he spent the following months recovering, eventually rejoining his team as a spectator at the Nationals in Vegas. If that run this past June turns out to be Force's last race, it ended the way you'd expect—he won.

LOSER: THE FORD PROBE I GHIA THAT BURNED AFTER PEBBLE BEACH

When we attend Pebble Beach or Amelia Island, or any local show, we tend to gawk at the cars without really considering how they got there. But the reality is that any car show, no matter how exalted, involves risk—cars must leave their climate-controlled garages and head out into the chaotic world, and sometimes that journey is fatal. Such was the case with the 1979 Ford Probe I Ghia concept that burned to the ground inside its trailer. The vehicle was on its way home from the Pebble Beach concours after its glamorous appearance with the featured wedge cars. The car's owner, the Scott Grundfor Company, specializes in restorations, so maybe there's hope, but this is a reminder that no matter how coddled your car is, accidents happen. Totaled, though, is a state of mind.

WINNER: WEIRD ENGINES

Internal combustion might seem like an evolutionary dead end when we've got electric sedans running around with four-figure horsepower, but the world's tinkerers are still dreaming up new approaches to explosion-based propulsion. Porsche filed a patent for a six-stroke engine [see "Six Education," page 22] that delivers two power strokes for every three turns of the crank (what does that sound like?). Honda is again playing with a V-3 for motorcycles, but now it's supercharged. And a company called Avadi is perfecting an engine without a conventional crankshaft—the piston and cylinder rotate within the case. When Infiniti first put its variable-compression engine in the 2019 QX50, we thought it might be Peak Weird Engine, but maybe it was more like the beginning of a trend. Our challenge to engine makers: inline-seven.

LOSER: THE LIGHTNING AND EVS IN GENERAL

In what might be considered a metaphor for the market, Ford plans to reorient a Canadian factory from EV production to . . . assembling Super Duty trucks. Makes sense, given that Ford also halted Lightning production amid meager demand. Meanwhile, VinFast's North Carolina factory is going nowhere, Fisker went bankrupt, and even mighty Tesla saw its sales decline for the first half of 2024. In the face of these headwinds, Hyundai Ioniq 5 sales were up 20 percent through the first three quarters of 2024, hinting that maybe the secret to electric adoption is to make EVs awesome.

WINNER: THE MUSTANG

Ford's pony car has no challenger—literally, because there's no Dodge Challenger. There's also no Chevy Camaro, meaning Mopar fans and the bow-tie brigade might need to reevaluate their loyalties and learn to embrace the Stang, keeper of the V-8 flame. You'd think that a lack of competition would lead to complacency, but instead, Ford is building the Dark Horse with 500 naturally aspirated horsepower and taking on Porsche GT cars with the 815-hp GTD. Even a four-banger Mustang convertible will put a smile on your face when you meet it in the rental lot. Sure, the nation's Mustang population is under constant threat from Cars & Coffee departures, but fear not: Ford will make more.

LOSER: FAKE VENTS

Well-placed vents used to mean a car's aerodynamics or thermal management needed support, pure performance-machine stuff. Not anymore. The Mazda CX-50 Hybrid has bulging, inoperative rear-fender vents, but normcore cars aren't the only fake-vent offenders—the Toyota GR Supra has plenty of performance, but that doesn't make its hood vents any less fake. You can't tell a real vent from a fake vent anymore, we tell ya! What's more, some cars actually have functional vents, but they're hidden, like the Subaru Outback XT's sneaky underhood intercooler ductwork. You know which car was honest? The Dodge Viper ACR. You removed those fender vents and left them at home while you set lap records, and everyone knew those giant holes in the bodywork were more than a stylistic affectation. Thank you for letting us ve— Er, never mind.

WINNER: DRIVER WITH A HALLOWEEN SKELETON IN THE HOV LANE

It seemed like a foolproof plan: Trick HOV enforcement by placing a fake skeleton in the passenger's seat. And make it look good—pull a Ghostface mask over the skull and buckle up your decoy as if it were a real live passenger. Somehow, police in San Jose, California, were not fooled by this sophisticated ruse, but we still judge this a win. Think of the Skeleton HOV Gambit as a work in progress, a proof of concept akin to the Wright brothers' first flight. Future iterations might include clothes, or maybe our solo commuter will go in an entirely new direction for their shotgun-seat impostor (dog wearing sunglasses, for example). But like we always say, a cop who's busy writing a ticket for an HOV skeleton is a cop who's not writing us one for speeding.

LOSER: RECARO GOES BANKRUPT

Founded in 1906, Recaro eventually became synonymous with great seats, building chairs for some iconic cars (see: the 1965 Porsche 911) and lending an air of performance cred to mainstream rides like the Volkswagen GTI and the Ford Mustang. So we're not saying that its recent bankruptcy is necessarily tied to its 2020 acquisition by a private equity firm, but it's funny how this kind of thing tends to happen to legendary companies acquired by private equity. Meanwhile, if you're contemplating a Mustang (winner, see left), consider the Recaro option. Because whatever's happening with Recaro's books, it's no fault of the seats.

WINNER: ONEWAY LILMAN

Seventh-grader Alex Santacroce, a.k.a. Oneway Lilman, is a figure of some controversy in Haverford, Pennsylvania. Santacroce has about 1.6 million YouTube followers who enjoy his bike stunts. He specializes in wheelies but is game to pull a trick on almost anything with wheels, annoying some neighbors in the process. (His siblings get in on the act too: In 2021, their father pleaded guilty to a charge of letting one of them "illegally operate a bicycle.") We don't like to take sides in local disputes, but in this case, we have to emphatically endorse the kid riding bikes because bikes are the gateway machine that gave most of us our first taste of wheeled speed. Also, Santacroce evidently makes around $100,000 a year from sponsorships and ads. If he needs advice on a first car, his people can call us.

LOSER: ANYONE LEAVING KEYS IN A VEHICLE AT A MIDDLE SCHOOL

We really want to say, "Don't steal a forklift," but the fact is that a forklift and a telehandler are distinct machines, and in late 2023, the latter was stolen from a construction site at a middle school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where a 12-year-old ascertained that the key was inside and decided to take a drive. A telehandler (basically a forklift on roids) is quick by the standards of its genre but nevertheless didn't present much of a high-speed chase, as its juvenile operator went on an hour-plus drive before the fuzz nabbed him. Listen, kids: bike tricks good, telehandler theft bad. And if you're going to bring a skeleton to use the HOV lane, at least put a shirt on it.

SINCE WE APPRECIATE GREAT TALENT IN ALL ITS FORMS, WE ALSO HONOR THE 10BEST TRUCKS, SUVS, AND VANS, INCLUDING ONE WINNER WITH LITERAL BUZZ.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ROE

THE DISCUSSION AROUND this year's 10Best Trucks competition had some editors wishing the award were called 12Best. The crop of excellent family (or whatever) haulers grew by leaps and bounds, while last year's winners, including some models that are getting quite old, aged gracefully. The need for nanometer-scale scrutiny has never been higher.

Thankfully, we have a great evaluation process in place—the exact same one we use for cars, in fact. After two long weeks of driving everything new that's not a car around our evaluation loop and creating roostertails on dirt roads, we settled on the 10 vehicles that best fulfill their intended mission while still being a joy to drive.

The Porsche Macan's logbook contained more superlatives than any other. Porsche didn't have an electric Macan for our test, but the gas version did fine on its own. And it may be nearing the end of the line, which led to almost every editor treating the logbook like a guestbook at a funeral. We may have even spotted some dried tears on the page.

Chin up, gang. Porsche says the gas-powered Macan will stick around through 2026. That's great news, as the Macan provides some of the most engaging dynamics of any SUV. The steering is tight and full of feedback, the GTS's 434-hp twin-turbo V-6 absolutely scoots, and the body still looks beautiful even though it dates to 2015.

PORSCHE MACAN

> "AN ENGAGING SUV THAT ACES THE ROLE OF A LIFETIME BY CONVINCING EVERYONE IT'S A SPORTS SEDAN."
>
> *—MIKE SUTTON*

PORSCHE MACAN
Base: $64,895–$90,995
Power: 261–434 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 3.5–5.0 sec
EPA Combined: 19–21 mpg

KIA TELLURIDE

“THE SPACIOUS TELLURIDE DELIVERS JAW-DROPPING STYLE AND VALUE.”

—AUSTIN IRWIN

KIA TELLURIDE
Base: $37,585–$42,485
Power: 291 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph (*C/D* est): 6.5–6.7 sec
EPA Combined: 20–22 mpg

The Macan is better at being a car than some sedans are, plus tossing a few lacrosse bags in the back is easy—although we'll acknowledge that the cargo hold isn't the biggest, and the back seat is far from the roomiest. We'll truly miss the internal-combustion Macan once it sails over the horizon and its electric successor takes over entirely, but we're sure Porsche knows exactly how good the upcoming EV must be to live up to the lofty expectations its forebear has set.

Like the Macan, the Kia Telluride is beginning to sprout some gray hairs. But, as senior editor Greg Fink noted, “Both the Macan and the Telluride prove age is just a number.” The three-row Telluride continues to impress, even as its segment swells with competition boasting an ever-broadening spectrum of powertrain types. As a multiyear 10Best winner, the Telluride has exhibited real staying power despite a lot of newer competition.

Save for a mild nip and tuck, the Telluride hasn’t changed much since its 2020 debut, and that’s fine by us. The third row is adult-friendly, the 291-hp V-6 provides both punch and capability, and the Telluride can tow up to 5500 pounds. Body control is superb for an SUV of this size, one of the reasons the Telluride manages to feel smaller than its footprint would suggest. The Kia handles and drives better than newer competitors, including the Toyota Grand Highlander, which failed to pass 10Best muster for 2025. The Telluride just feels right.

The Chevrolet Trax marks its second 10Best win as the biggest value play of the bunch. With a base price that’s a hair under $21,500 and the top trim opening in the $25,000s, the Trax boasts the lowest cost of entry of any 10Best winner on either list. At these prices, you might expect to make a lot of sacrifices, but there aren’t too many things we’d change about the Trax.

Simply put, no other small SUV better combines appeal and affordability. The interior im-

CHEVROLET TRAX

“AN AUTOMOTIVE TOUR DE FORCE THAT PROVES AFFORDABLE ISN’T THE SAME THING AS CHEAP.”

—TONY QUIROGA

HONDA CR-V
Base: $31,450–$37,500
Power: 190–204 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 7.9–8.1 sec
EPA Combined:
28–40 mpg

CHEVROLET TRAX
Base: $21,495
Power: 137 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 8.8 sec
EPA Combined:
29–30 mpg

TRAX PHOTOGRAPH BY MARC URBANO

HONDA CR-V

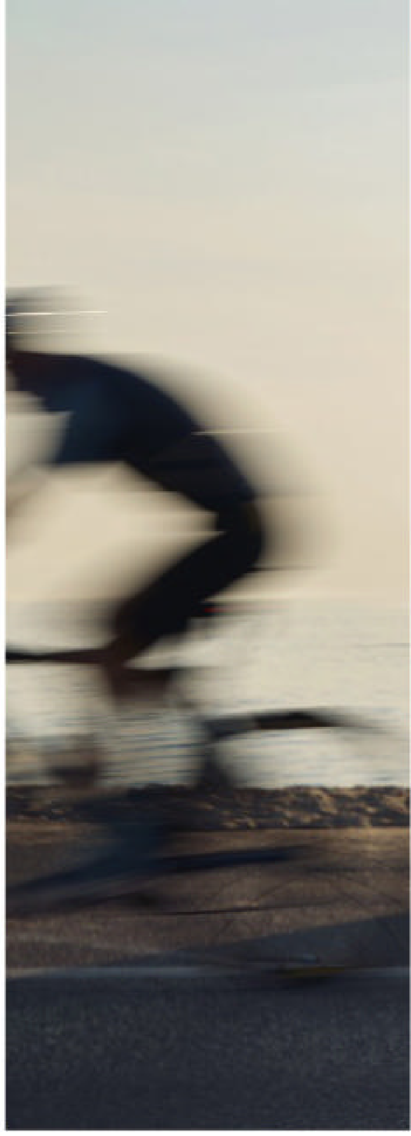
> **“REFINED AND EFFICIENT. MORE FUN THAN YOU MIGHT EXPECT.”**
>
> ***—DAVID BEARD***

presses with its sharp design, while the generous wheelbase ensures there’s plenty of space for both rear-seat passengers and cargo-hold baggage. At its most bedecked, the Trax gives value-conscious buyers genuine luxuries, including remote start, a heated steering wheel, and an easy-to-use 11.0-inch touchscreen that flows into a nicely designed digital gauge display. Its 137-hp turbocharged 1.2-liter inline-three isn’t brimming with power, but it’s mated to a chassis that lets you have some fun without devolving into discombobulation.

Another seemingly modest SUV that provides an unexpectedly large dose of driving enjoyment comes from—surprise, surprise—Honda. The Honda CR-V continues to shine with its effortless blend of fuel economy, family-friendliness, and build quality. Many editors opined that the CR-V provides a near luxury-car-like experience for the segment, converting inputs to outputs with smoothness and grace that belie the sub-$32,000 base price.

The CR-V also offers an appreciably different pair of powertrains. The lowest three trims come with a 190-hp turbocharged 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine, which has less verve than we’d like, but the CR-V’s underlying bits kept us enrapt. Move up to the 204-hp hybrid, and the powertrain offers a lot more refinement and fuel economy for not much more money. Think of the CR-V as an Accord or a Civic in SUV form. Odds are it will suit your needs.

The CR-V isn’t the only familiar friend on this year’s 10Best list. Another luxurious multiyear winner, the Genesis GV70, has once again made its way to the top of the dogpile. And for good reason: The GV70 nails its mission to deliver equal



doses of driving excitement, comfort, and value. And with an available battery-electric powertrain, in the clearly named Electrified GV70, you can have your serenity fueled by whichever propulsion you prefer.

The entry-level GV70 gas trims use a 300-hp turbocharged 2.5-liter inline-four, but it's the twin-turbo 3.5-liter V-6, which throws another 75 horses into the mix, that lights our fire. Both internal-combustion engines work quietly in the distance, but the Electrified GV70 really brings the silence. Its pair of electric motors cranks up the wick to 483 horsepower, which is enough zoot to scoot this ute to 60 mph in 3.8 seconds. And in the GV70, you can enjoy that hustle surrounded by top-tier accommodations that must keep the competition awake at night.

At least a few people at Volkswagen are sleeping a little easier knowing that they have the only electric minivan on sale today. Despite its retro appearance, the ID.Buzz is a step ahead of the current generation of hybrid minivans. This vehicle immediately won us over with its packaging, charm, and (believe it or not) driving dynamics.

The ID.Buzz snapped more pedestrian necks than any other car at 10Best by a country mile, but this isn't just a show pony. You can have it in rear-drive form with 282 horsepower and an EPA-estimated 234 miles of range or in all-wheel-drive guise, good for 335 horses and a claimed 231 miles. Those range estimates aren't going to make the Buzz a road-trip hero, but they should be plenty for an around-town, haul-it-all family transporter. Storage space? It's a box. There's tons of space inside. And the Buzz's front glass offers a forward view that's usually reserved for transit-bus drivers. Over the road, the electric van delivers ample hustle amid relative silence. Although, its pricing might be a tough pill to swallow.

If you'd like to spend your $60,000 or so on something electric that isn't a minivan, may we suggest the Ioniq 5 N? This Hyundai, our 2024 Electric Vehicle of the Year, joins its more level-headed Ioniq 5 siblings on the 2025 10Best list. Nothing bridges the gap between internal-combustion and electric performance like the Ioniq 5 N. It's hugely fast and highly capable, and the N's electro-trickery can make it seem like it has a gas engine and an eight-speed automatic gearbox. You get the option to enjoy the EV experience or a gas experience.

The entire Ioniq 5 lineup is about delivering the best of both worlds. The less performance-focused Ioniq 5s straddle the line between hatchback and SUV, offering carlike dynamics while providing the passenger and cargo space you expect of an SUV. And now that the 2025 model finally brings a rear wiper into the equa-

GENESIS GV70

"A CRÈME BRÛLÉE OF A CAR, A SWEET TREAT."

—*ELANA SCHERR*

GENESIS GV70
Base: $47,050–$68,300
Power: 300–483 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 3.8–5.6 sec
EPA Combined:
20–24 mpg/91 MPGe

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5
Base: $43,975–$67,495
Power: 168–641 hp
PERFORMANCE (*C/D* EST)
60 mph: 3.0–7.8 sec
EPA Combined:
78–114 MPGe

ID.BUZZ PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG PAJO

VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ
Base: $61,545–$69,545
Power: 282–335 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph (*C/D* est): 5.5–6.5 sec
EPA Combined: 80–83 MPGe

VOLKSWAGEN ID.BUZZ

"LOTS OF THUMBS-UP IN THE SCHOOL DROP-OFF LINE!"

—K.C. COLWELL

tion, we're running seriously low on nits to pick. We keep waiting for an automaker to deliver something better, but as of this writing, nobody's been able to.

Another paragon of value and packaging that has yet to be topped is the Ford Maverick. This three-time winner combines real capability—a 4000-pound tow rating with optional equipment and a bed that accommodates flat sheets

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5

"ART IMITATES LIFE IMITATES A 10-YEAR-OLD'S DREAMS."

—DAVID GLUCKMAN

FORD MAVERICK
Base: $27,990–$30,210
Power: 191–238 hp
PERFORMANCE (*C/D* EST)
60 mph: 6.0–7.7 sec
EPA Combined: 21–37 mpg

of plywood—with a small footprint that makes this truck as easy to live with as it is to park. And needless to say, larger pickups can only look on with astonishment at the Maverick Hybrid's 37 mpg combined number. Plus, this truck has a cleverly laid-out cabin packed with storage cubbies, and its design makes the best of the hard plastics that accompany this price point.

The Maverick doesn't really show its age, yet it's being treated to a refresh for 2025 that brings a fresh face, a larger infotainment touchscreen, and new trim colors inside. There's also a performance-focused Lobo variant with a lowered suspension that may reignite the sporty mini-truck fad of the 1980s. The 2025 version also pairs all-wheel drive with the hybrid powertrain for the first time, a combination we've wished for since day one.

FORD MAVERICK

> **“THIS CONCEPT IS STILL SO RIGHT.”**
>
> *—JOE LORIO*

While the compact Maverick's entire lineup made it onto the 10Best list, its big brother the Ranger wasn't as lucky. But one trim—the Ford Ranger Raptor—surprised and delighted every editor. Few trucks (or cars, for that matter) elicited as much admiration as the Ranger Raptor. Even editors who wouldn't exactly call themselves “truck people” filled the Raptor's logbook with praise.

What makes it so good? We'll start with its powertrain, a twin-turbo 3.0-liter V-6 making 405 horsepower and 430 pound-feet of torque.

FORD RANGER RAPTOR
Base: $57,315
Power: 405 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph: 5.3 sec
EPA Combined: 17 mpg

FORD RANGER RAPTOR

> **“A MID-SIZE TRUCK WITH MEGA PERSONALITY.”**
>
> *—CARTER FRY*

RAM 1500
Base: $42,270–$77,150
Power: 305–540 hp
PERFORMANCE
60 mph (*C/D* est):
4.2–8.0 sec
EPA Comb: 17–23 mpg

RAM 1500

“ONE PART GIANT, ONE PART ISOLATION CHAMBER, TWO PARTS WORKHORSE. IT’S MODERN AMERICAN LUXURY.”

—ANDREW KROK

It sends this truck to 60 mph in a fleet 5.3 seconds, positively trouncing the rival Toyota Tacoma TRD Pro’s 7.7-second run. Carrying most of the same adjustability as the F-150 Raptor via easily located steering-wheel buttons, the Ranger Raptor can be as raucous or as chill as its bigger brother. And yet, it doesn’t require an airport ground crew to marshal you into a parking spot. The part of the Ranger Raptor experience that won everyone over, though, was its ride. Senior editor Elana Scherr put it best: “This thing is better to drive than several cars from 10 years ago.”

Speaking of trucks that are better than a few cars, the Ram 1500 once again is the only full-size pickup on our list. This year brings some big changes. Most notably, the Ram no longer offers a V-8, a decision that could have cost it a win. Have no fear, though; the two versions of the Hurricane twin-turbo 3.0-liter inline-six on offer are good. So good that multiple editors’ logbook entries marveled at how the new straight-six improves the entire experience. And our testing revealed that the new Hurricane engine makes the 1500 substantially quicker than its naturally aspirated V-8–equipped predecessor.

In its Louis XIV–extravagant Tungsten form, the Ram 1500 is basically a high-riding luxury car. It floats over the road, while the interior is so rich with features and high-quality materials that it puts a few luxury cars to shame. There is no other pickup on the market that coddles its owners like this—and without sacrificing a smidgen of capability. It sets the bar high, and that’s what 10Best is all about.

MAVERICK PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL SIMARI

THE ALFA ROMEO GIULIA BMW M3 COMPETITION, CT4-V BLACKWING HEAD TO FIND OUT WHICH ONE THE SPORTS-SEDAN

QUADRIFOGLIO, THE AND THE CADILLAC SOUTH ON A ROAD TRIP BEST DELIVERS ON PROMISE.

BY EZRA DYER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES LIPMAN

One of us, gassing up the 2025 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing, says, "No, we drove from Michigan. Where it's also legal. But still no." A third editor, stepping from the 2024 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio, asks, "Isn't weed legal in West Virginia anyway? We saw a medical dispensary." The gas-station guy replies, "Well, yeah. But if you have one of those cards, then you can't own a gun." Effectively illegal, then, to this guy. Fueled up and with a fresh understanding of West Virginia drug law, we return to the road with our mind-altering sports sedans, legal in all 50 states but capable of extremely extralegal feats of performance.

SOMEWHERE IN WEST VIRGINIA, A GAS-STATION ATTENDANT EYES THE CALIFORNIA PLATE ON THE 2025 BMW M3 COMPETITION AND ASKS, "YOU BOYS BRING ANY OF THAT LEGAL CALIFORNIA WEED WITH YOU?"

2025 BMW M3 Competition
HIGHS: Violently quick, always up to play, comfortable interior. **LOWS:** Can't get the Comp with a manual, unreadable gauges, menus upon menus of settings. **VERDICT:** A four-door that feels ready for Le Mans.

Which is why we're heading to Rockingham Speedway in North Carolina. The M3 hits 100 mph in 7.3 seconds, the Giulia tops out at a claimed 191 mph, and the CT4-V feels so untroubled at 96 mph that you'd swear you're going 65, Your Honor. These cars need a track like a hyper Labrador puppy needs a dog park, and Rockingham is just the place. The famous NASCAR venue hosted its last race in 2013 and then slid into disrepair, but new ownership and a multimillion-dollar glow-up brought Rockingham back from the dead, with the Xfinity Series and Craftsman Trucks on the schedule for April. Both the mile-long high-banked oval and the infield road course got new pavement, so we figured we'd do our part to lay down some fresh rubber. First, though, we had to get there—from Michigan.

Which is about 800 miles away, once you account for back-road detours and visits to colorful West Virginia gas stations. But a great sports sedan should excel at this kind of mission, melting away the highway miles and then terrorizing a closed course with equal aplomb. If you're looking for a daily driver that puts the devil on your shoulder, allow us to present three of the finest choices yet proffered to the motoring public.

Rockingham Speedway's steep bankings caused the Alfa's electronics to freak out, and the proximity of the wall to the upper lane made us appreciate the sweat-wicking properties of Tommy John underwear.

2025 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing
HIGHS: Ride and handling magic, delightful manual transmission, can do the Cadillac relaxed-luxury thing. **LOWS:** Could use a splash of power, interior has the faint aura of Chevy Malibu, drains its fuel tank faster than the others. **VERDICT:** One of the all-time greats.

2024 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio
HIGHS: Beautiful curves and proportions, exhaust note of the gods, doesn't really need any options. **LOWS:** Hasn't changed much over eight model years, throwing fits on the high banking doesn't inspire confidence, dead car driving. **VERDICT:** Optimistic iconoclasts, step right up.

The Giulia Quadrifoglio is an everyday Italian that's powered by the best-sounding V-6 this side of a Ferrari 296GTB. Options are few, so our car's $91,415 as-tested price didn't stray too far from the base of $83,465. Choice items included Rosso Etna paint ($1750), Sparco seats ($3500), and an exposed roof made of carbon fiber ($2500). Even without a single option, the Quad contains a 787's worth of carbon fiber—its driveshaft, hood, rocker panels, and rear spoiler are all constructed of the stuff. Shhh, nobody tell Alfa that other companies charge extra for that kind of thing.

Our German entrant commits to the four-door race-car aesthetic, all flared fenders and attitude, then backs up the bombast with hyperbolic performance. The M3 Competition's base price is $81,375, but ours included plenty of options: Frozen Preciosa Red Metallic paint ($4500), Carbon package ($14,300 for carbon-ceramic brakes, M carbon bucket seats, and various other goodies), and the M Alcantara steering wheel ($500). The grand total, $105,875, saddled the M3 with the highest as-tested price of the group.

In this crowd, the Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing is the bargain play, with a base price of $63,590. But affordability does not equal inferiority—the Blackwing is a multiple 10Best winner, a road-course savant with a standard-issue manual transmission. This one would deplete your 401(k) by $85,010, still the least expensive car here despite its plethora of options. In addition to a pair of carbon-fiber packages totaling $11,600 (cover your ears, Alfa!), the CT4-V included a performance data and video recorder ($1600), the Sky Cool Gray interior package ($4900), and blue brake calipers ($595), among other add-ons.

If you own any car in this trio, congratulations. This contest is kind of like the Oscars—it's an honor just to be nominated. But we have to pick a winner, so let's hit the road.

The BMW's seats look like they should come with an ejection handle. The Alfa sports massive paddle shifters connected to the column. And the Caddy's cabin reminds you that this is the least expensive car here – but it does have the most comfortable seats.

	2024 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio	**2025 BMW M3 Competition**	**2025 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing**
Base/As Tested	$83,465/$91,415	$81,375/$105,875	**$63,590/$85,010**
Dimensions			
Wheelbase	111.0 in	112.5 in	109.3 in
Length/Width/Height	182.6/73.8/56.1 in	189.1/74.3/56.6 in	187.6/71.5/56.0 in
Track, F/R	61.2/63.3 in	63.7/63.2 in	60.5/60.5 in
Passenger Volume, F/R	53/41 ft^3	**55/43 ft^3**	52/38 ft^3
Trunk Volume	13 ft^3	**17 ft^3**	11 ft^3

Testing the Blackwing's three-across accommodations may have constituted an HR violation.

Interior and Exterior

The Cadillac looks the meanest in your rearview mirror. The Alfa has the most rakish profile. The BMW's halfway-to-matte paint tells you it's no normal sedan, in case you failed to clock the quad exhaust tips and 285/30ZR-20 Michelin Pilot Sport 4S tires crammed under the flared rear fenders. Linked up in a convoy, our swole sedans are impressive enough to bring out the social-media paparazzi in adjacent lanes, with lesser BMWs and Audis zooming up like remoras to a school of hammerheads.

The BMW grille is growing on us, which means it's tolerable. But all three cars look purposeful without veering into caricature, their high function begetting fetching form. Yeah, the BMW's carbon-ceramic rotors (15.7-inchers in front, 15.0 in back) are a boon to rotational and unsprung masses, but they're also lovely to behold in their crackle-mirror-esque splendor. And aren't the four-leaf Quadrifoglio badges adorning the Alfa's flanks the coolest logos ever? The CT4-V is the most conservatively styled here—it wears 18-inch wheels, as Caddy knows that bigger doesn't necessarily mean better—but its go-faster aero pieces somehow fit the tableau. One logbook entry read, "I normally consider carbon aero bits the worst rich-dad boy-racer nonsense on a street car, but the Cadillac's add-ons just sit right with me."

The interiors are more polarizing. The BMW clearly has the glitziest interior—check the illuminated M logos on the seatbacks—and the Alfa is simple and pretty but also cursed with dash rattle. The Cadillac looks drab by comparison. Even with its gussied-up interior package, it's a little too Chevy in the plastics. The caveat: It's the most comfortable and user-friendly interior of the bunch. Its front seats prove that trackworthy bolsters can coexist with heating, ventilation, and massage functions, the only chairs in the group that offer all three. It's the sole car here with a power tilt and telescoping steering column, and it mostly eschews touchscreen-menu overload in favor of intuitive knobs and buttons. Over 20 years ago, BMW began beating iDrive into us, and its current menu structure has us on the ropes again. Still, you get the idea that the BMW interior is meant to impress in the showroom, but the Cadillac is designed to complement the driving experience over a span of years. The Alfa splits the difference.

Powertrain and Performance

If this were merely a comparison between engines, we'd all vote for the Alfa and its twin-turbo 2.9-liter 90-degree V-6, which issues a deranged bark at startup and feels ever eager to unleash a tire-roasting frenzy of horsepower. Put the Alfa in Dynamic mode to uncork the exhaust, and it sounds like a babbling brook of nitromethane. BMW's twin-turbo 3.0-liter inline-six is likewise characterful but only after you select the proper menus. (Why is there a button to make the exhaust louder when you need to go into the setup menu and select Sport Plus to truly unleash the M3's most inspiring soundtrack?) The Caddy's 472-hp twin-turbocharged 3.6-liter V-6 is the least charismatic engine, but it's married to the most charismatic transmission. Every time we opened the door, the sight of that stubby shifter poking out of the console brightened our mood.

The M3 Competition ruled the acceleration tests, but the elder Alfa was right on its bumper—impressive, given that the Quadrifoglio is largely the same car that debuted for 2017, when it was up against the previous generations of the M3 and the Cadillac ATS-V. The M3 Comp torched 60 mph in 3.2 seconds, with the Alfa needing 3.4 seconds and the Blackwing breaking the tape in 4.1 seconds. The 503-hp BMW and the 505-hp Alfa weigh within four pounds of each other, so their real-world results match their similarity on paper. And the Caddy's result was predictable, given its power deficit and manual transmission. Would you trade a few tenths of a second at the drag strip for the pleasure of shifting your own gears? You can guess where we stand on that. It helps that the Blackwing's launch-control programming paired with a no-lift-shift feature gives up little to the optional 10-speed automatic.

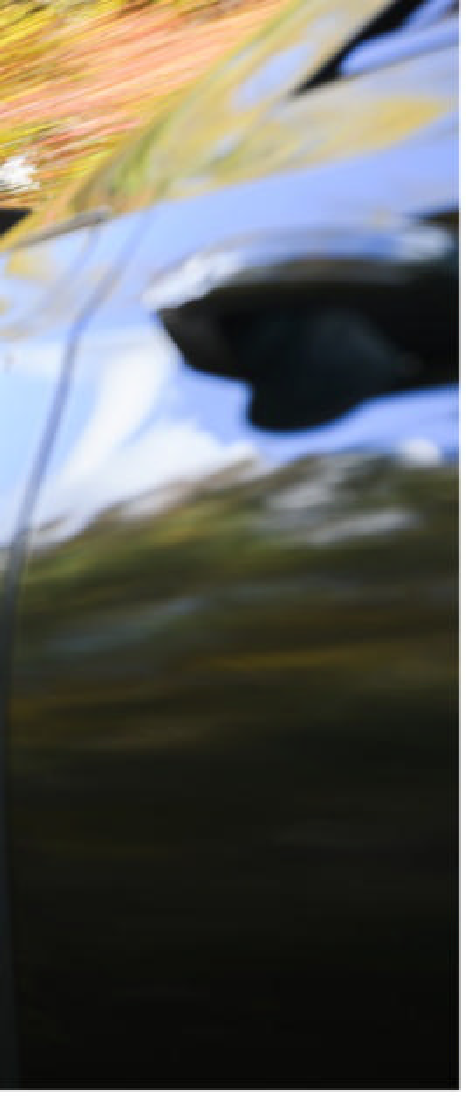
Though the Cadillac is shy on thrust, it generates plenty enough speed to exploit its fantastical handling abilities. Here we have a four-door sedan with a fine ride that nevertheless pulls 1.04 g's on the skidpad, beating the BMW's 1.02 g's and the Alfa's disappointing 0.94 g on P Zero Corsas, the most aggressive rubber here. All that development time on GM's Milford Road Course obviously paid off for the Blackwing.

Driving Experience

Through the mountains of West Virginia and the two-lanes of North Carolina, each car established

On Rockingham's infield road course, the BMW's drift analyzer activated an extra shift at the Michelin plant on account of us.

Drive Mode
Sport
Track
Snow/Ice
MPH
290mi



	2024 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio	2025 BMW M3 Competition	2025 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing
Powertrain			
Engine	twin-turbocharged DOHC 24-valve V-6 176 in^3 (2891 cm^3)	twin-turbocharged DOHC 24-valve inline-6 183 in^3 (2993 cm^3)	twin-turbocharged DOHC 24-valve V-6 218 in^3 (3564 cm^3)
Power, hp @ rpm	**505** @ 6500	503 @ 6250	472 @ 5750
Torque, lb-ft @ rpm	443 @ 2500	**479** @ 2750	445 @ 3500
Redline	7000/7250 rpm	7200/7200 rpm	6400/6500 rpm
lb per hp	**7.5**	7.6	8.2
Driveline			
Transmission	8-speed automatic	8-speed automatic	6-speed manual
Driven Wheels	rear	rear	rear
Final-Drive Ratio:1	3.09	3.15	3.73
Chassis			
Suspension	**F**: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R**: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	**F**: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R**: multilink, coil springs, active anti-roll bar	**F**: struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **R**: multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Brakes	**F**: 14.2-in vented, cross-drilled disc **R**: 13.8-in vented, cross-drilled disc	**F**:15.7-in vented, cross-drilled carbon-ceramic disc **R**: 15.0-in vented, cross-drilled carbon-ceramic disc	**F**: 15.0-in vented disc **R**: 13.4-in vented disc
Stability Control	fully defeatable	fully defeatable, traction off, competition modes, launch control	fully defeatable, traction off, competition modes, launch control
Tires	Pirelli P Zero Corsa Asimmetrico 2 **F**: 245/35ZR-19 (93Y) AR **R**: 285/30ZR-19 (98Y) AR	Michelin Pilot Sport 4S **F**: 275/35ZR-19 (100Y) ★ **R**: 285/30ZR-20 (99Y) ★	Michelin Pilot Sport 4S **F**: 255/35ZR-18 (94Y) TPC **R**: 275/35ZR-18 (99Y) TPC

its on-road persona—which can be different from its on-track persona, as we'd find out. The Cadillac is the only sedan here that settles down and relaxes when the road straightens, channeling its land-yacht forebears in its highway composure. Mellow out the adaptive dampers, hush the exhaust, and fire up that seat massager, and it's possible to forget you're wheeling a stone-cold road-course assassin. The BMW feels more keyed up, its adjustable seat bolsters spanning narrow to narrower and its spring rates calibrated for freshly paved racetrack. The Alfa is more capable of chillaxing but goads you into antisocial behavior. It sounds so good when it's loud that you figure, "Let's choose Dynamic mode—no, Race!—and manual shifting," and the next thing you know, you're frying the tires on on-ramps, grabbing gears with those huge fixed shift paddles, and cackling right along with the exhaust. Caught up in the moment, one editor extended pursed

The Alfa's engine sings the prettiest song and is the most powerful, but if BMW's 3.0-liter six actually makes only 503 horsepower, we'll eat the M3's strut-tower brace.

TEST RESULTS	2024 Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio	2025 BMW M3 Competition	2025 Cadillac CT4-V Blackwing
Acceleration			
30 mph	1.5 sec	**1.4 sec**	1.7 sec
60 mph	3.4 sec	**3.2 sec**	4.1 sec
100 mph	7.7 sec	**7.3 sec**	9.7 sec
150 mph	19.0 sec	**17.9 sec**	25.9 sec
170 mph	29.2 sec	**27.7 sec**	—
1/4-Mile @ mph	11.6 sec @ 122	**11.4 sec** @ **125**	12.5 sec @ 114
	Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.	*Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.2 sec.*	*Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.*
Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	**4.1 sec**	4.4 sec	5.2 sec
Top Gear, 30–50 mph	**2.2 sec**	2.4 sec	9.2 sec
Top Gear, 50–70 mph	**2.5 sec**	2.7 sec	6.6 sec
Top Speed	**191 mph (mfr claim)**	180 mph (mfr claim)	189 mph (mfr claim)
Chassis			
Braking, 70–0 mph	154 ft	**147 ft**	153 ft
Braking, 100–0 mph	308 ft	**293 ft**	301 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.94 g	1.02 g	**1.04 g**
Weight			
Curb	3808 lb	**3804 lb**	3859 lb
Distribution, F/R	53.1/46.9%	52.7/47.3%	52.9/47.1%
Fuel			
Capacity/Octane	15.3 gal/91	15.6 gal/93	**17.4 gal**/93
EPA Comb/City/Hwy	**20**/**17**/**25 mpg**	19/16/23 mpg	18/15/23 mpg
C/D 800-mi Trip	21 mpg	**23 mpg**	20 mpg
75-mph Hwy Driving	**28 mpg**	**28 mpg**	23 mpg
75-mph Hwy Range	420 mi	**430 mi**	400 mi
Sound Level			
Idle/Full Throttle	46/**83 dBA**	43/87 dBA	**40**/86 dBA
70-mph Cruise	**72 dBA**	**72 dBA**	73 dBA

Tested by David Beard and Dave VanderWerp in Chelsea, MI

fingers at uncooperative traffic, but that was just once. No, you don't have to do any of that. But you will do that because the devil on your shoulder speaks a lot louder in a Giulia Quadrifoglio.

When we finally arrive at Rockingham, different personalities emerge. We're not really tracking the cars so much as engaging in the highest form of high school delinquency, exploring the cars' limits on a vast paved playground instead of public roads.

The Alfa, so cocky on the street, is less sure of itself now. In fact, merely driving onto the track sets off a cascade of warning lights as the turn onto the 25-degree banking causes some internal electronic panic. A timeout cures the problem, but after some tail-out shenanigans on the infield road course, the Alfa again throws a flag on the fun, demanding another shutdown and cool-off, after which it's perfectly fine again. The Alfa's cantankerousness is a bummer given how fun it is to push its limits.

The BMW's Alcantara steering wheel proved its worth up on the top lane of the oval, where even sane speeds can make for sweaty palms—boy, that wall is right there! Down on the infield road course, the BMW's high limits meant that much more speed was required before the meaty Michelins relinquished their hold on the pavement. But when they did, fun was had, as quantified by the onboard drift analyzer. However, the M3's steering wheel only hints at the secrets of the contact patches. One note read, "The steering is the biggest disappointment. Try all the steering modes you want—none provide any meaningful feedback."

Blasting down North Carolina back roads got us thinking that the CT4-V, with its restrained exterior and 189-mph top speed, would be our choice for running 'shine.

The Alfa's badge required explanation to puzzled onlookers. Why yes, that is a Visconti serpent. No, it's not from Milan, Michigan.

The Blackwing, the most comfortable on the road, was also the happiest on the track. Press the V button on the steering wheel to summon your desired settings, and the Caddy transforms into an apex-hunting animal, its exhaust booming righteous thunder on the overrun and its steering chatting it up. And you get the pleasure of choosing your own gears—with rev matching too, if you want it. The Caddy pitched its tail out but never pitched a fit, at all times exuding the vibe that yeah, of course it was built to huck around a NASCAR track for an hour and then mosey out for dinner. One logbook entry read, "The only real downside of driving the CT4-V Blackwing is knowing there's a CT5-V Blackwing."

And the Winner Is . . .

If you told us you just bought the Alfa, we'd proffer a lusty congrats, especially since the Quadrifoglio is discontinued for 2025. If you told us you're shopping the BMW, we'd say right on—the M3 is royalty. But this is a case where drag-strip numbers don't tell the whole story, and the CT4-V Blackwing is simply the best at executing a sports sedan's often conflicting missions. It's precise and emotional on a track, involving and livable on the street, and, on top of that, the least expensive. After five states, 800 miles, and one NASCAR track, we're confident in affirming the CT4-V Blackwing's status. We'd love to own all three of these cars, but we want a Blackwing the most. ■

Final Results

	VEHICLE												**POWERTRAIN**						**CHASSIS**						**EXPERIENCE**	**GRAND TOTAL**
	DRIVER COMFORT	ERGONOMICS	REAR-SEAT COMFORT	REAR-SEAT SPACE*	CARGO SPACE*	FEATURES/AMENITIES*	FIT AND FINISH	INTERIOR STYLING	EXTERIOR STYLING	REBATES/EXTRAS*	AS-TESTED PRICE*	SUBTOTAL	1/4-MILE ACCELERATION*	FLEXIBILITY*	FUEL ECONOMY*	ENGINE NVH	TRANSMISSION	SUBTOTAL	PERFORMANCE*	STEERING FEEL	BRAKE FEEL	HANDLING	RIDE	SUBTOTAL	FUN TO DRIVE	
Maximum points available	*10*	*10*	*5*	*5*	*5*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*5*	*20*	***100***	*20*	*5*	*10*	*10*	*10*	***55***	*20*	*10*	*10*	*10*	*10*	***60***	***25***	***240***
1. Cadillac CT4-V	**9**	**9**	2	3	3	9	7	8	9	0	**20**	**79**	15	2	7	**8**	**9**	**41**	**20**	**9**	**9**	**10**	**10**	**58**	**25**	**203**
2. BMW M3	6	8	3	**5**	**5**	**10**	**10**	**9**	7	**1**	15	**79**	**20**	2	**10**	**8**	**9**	**49**	**20**	6	7	8	8	**49**	21	**198**
3. Alfa Romeo Giulia	8	7	**4**	4	4	1	6	7	**10**	0	18	**69**	19	**3**	8	**8**	8	**46**	16	**9**	7	9	9	**50**	23	**188**

**These objective scores are calculated from the vehicles' dimensions, capacities, rebates and extras, and/or test results.*

PUMPED-

UP KICKS

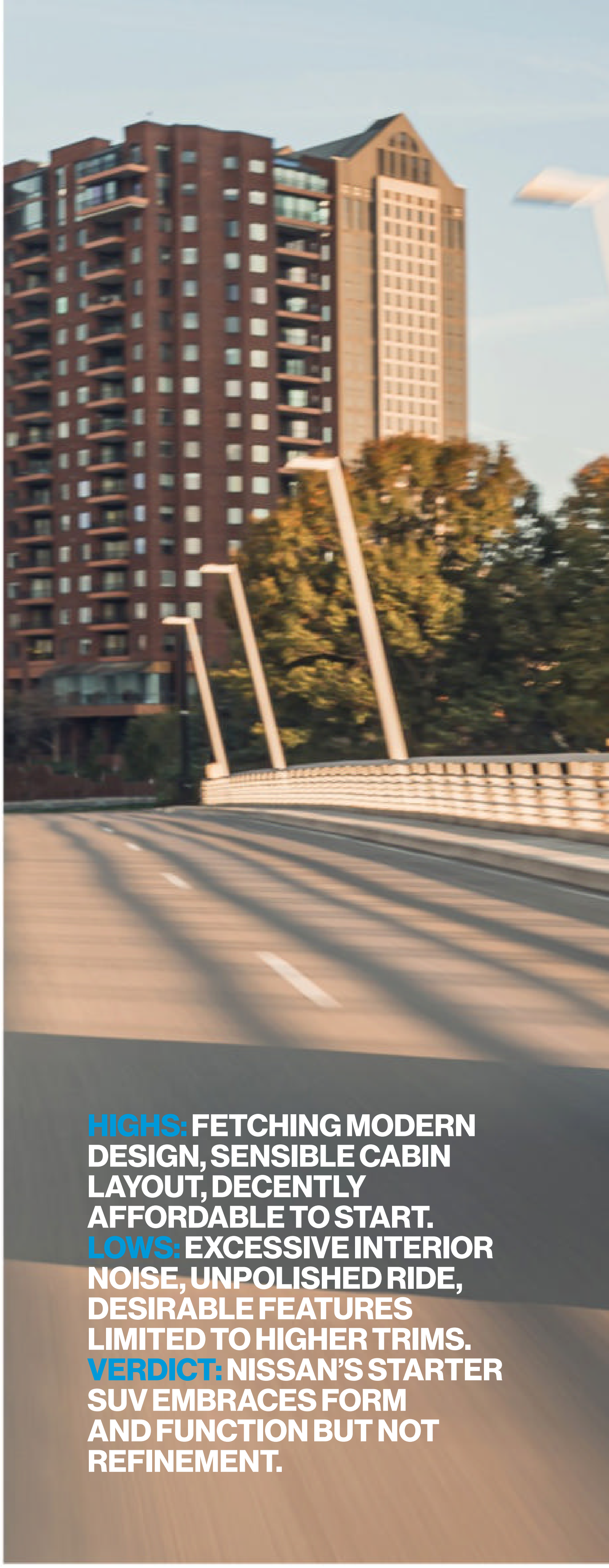
LONG A VALUE PLAYER AMONG ENTRY-LEVEL SUVS, THE NISSAN KICKS LEANS HEAVILY INTO SUBSTANCE WITH A COMPREHENSIVE 2025 REDESIGN.

by Mike Sutton / photography by Marc Urbano

NISSAN ISN'T SHY about experimenting with its subcompact offerings. In the recent past, it briefly gave us the adorable Cube, seemingly designed by Hello Kitty, followed by the frog-eyed Juke that somehow spawned a six-figure R-badged super-SUV in other markets. The comparatively normal Kicks introduced for 2018 resonated better with American shoppers. Yet with a meager maximum of 125 horsepower, the Kicks was soon outflanked by a series of newer, more substantial competitors. Novelty is fleeting, and tiny SUVs aren't so tiny anymore, so while extroverted elements glint across the redesigned 2025 Kicks, Nissan's primary focus was bringing more size, power, and content to its smallest SUV.

The new Kicks has distinctive style and is sufficiently attractive, albeit devoid of funky flourishes like the Cube's asymmetric rear-end design. Chunky lines and tasteful brightwork jibe with horizontal grille bars and LED running lights. Nissan says the design of the lower body cladding mimics the soles of athletic shoes, an influence that's hard to see on our Deep Blue Pearl test car. But opt for a brighter hue like Yuzu Yellow Metallic, and the Kicks might get away with a Nike swoosh down its side. Our top SR model's optional 19-inch aluminum wheels up the visual wattage over the standard 17s, though lesser trims come with 16- or 17-inch steel wheels wearing plastic covers. But this is a vehicle that starts at just $23,220, its increase over the outgoing model amounting to a $490 pittance.

More important are the larger proportions: It's 2.8 inches longer, 1.6 inches wider, and nearly an inch taller than before. Ground clearance is now a substantial 8.4 inches, a 1.4-inch increase. The wheelbase grows from 103.1 inches to either 104.6 or 104.9, depending on whether you go with the standard front-wheel-drive layout or spring for the newly available all-wheel drive ($1500 to $1650, depending on the model). If you're on the fence about spending the extra money, consider that front-drive versions have a torsion-beam rear axle, while all-wheel-drive examples like this one get an independent strut-type rear suspension.



HIGHS: FETCHING MODERN DESIGN, SENSIBLE CABIN LAYOUT, DECENTLY AFFORDABLE TO START. **LOWS:** EXCESSIVE INTERIOR NOISE, UNPOLISHED RIDE, DESIRABLE FEATURES LIMITED TO HIGHER TRIMS. **VERDICT:** NISSAN'S STARTER SUV EMBRACES FORM AND FUNCTION BUT NOT REFINEMENT.

Going all-wheel drive impinges on the cargo hold, however. Space drops from a rather generous maximum of 30 cubic feet with the rear seats up and 60 cubes with them folded to 24 and 50 cubic feet. Compared with the outgoing Kicks, we fit an additional carry-on-sized box (eight in total) in the wayback and two more (21) behind the front seats. Regardless of configuration, rear access is via a manual hatch that will tickle your tendinitis with its uncomfortably high release button.

Physics implies that more features and a bigger footprint will result in greater mass. Indeed, our 3322-pound Kicks weighs a hefty 659 pounds more than the last version we tested, a 2018 SR model. Approximately 200 pounds of that gain is from the all-wheel-drive system and its related hardware, but that's still a lot of pork. Combating this is a larger engine: a 141-hp 2.0-liter four-cylinder in place of the previous 1.6-liter unit. Torque increases from 114 pound-feet in the 2024 model to 140, though it still peaks at a high 4000 rpm, which you're reminded of when this gravelly four-banger labors through the continuously variable automatic transmission's stepped ratios. With seemingly little sound isolation [see "Sound Off," page 62], the full-throttle pulls needed to get the Kicks up to higher speeds seem even noisier inside than the 77 decibels we recorded. The fatiguing 73-decibel din we measured at 70 mph is three decibels louder than in the old Kicks and up to five higher than some in the small SUV's current cohort. Our long-term 2022 Ford Bronco on 35-inch mud-terrain tires punished our ears less.

Nissan's dalliance with intentionally weird small cars such as the Juke and the Cube has come to an end, apparently.

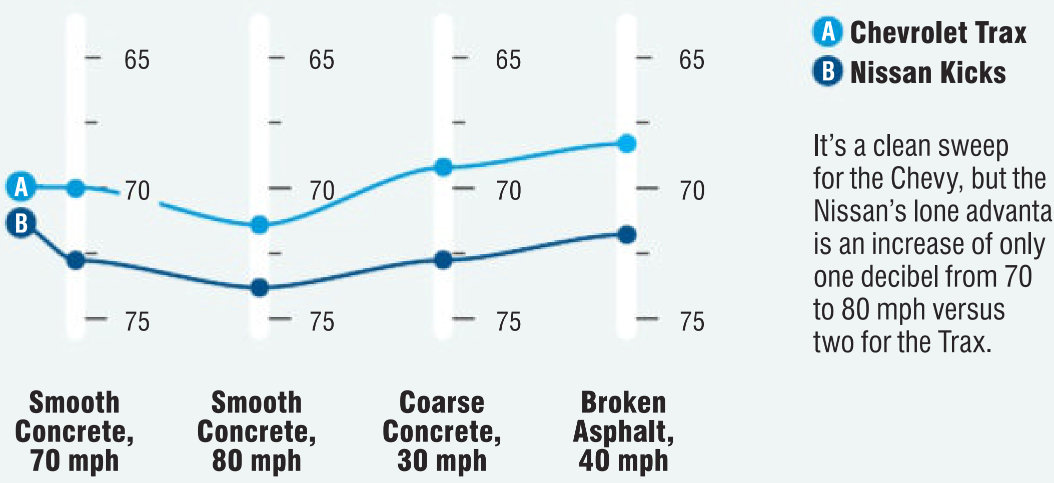
BONUS TEST

SOUND OFF

Silence is golden.

After multiple complaints about the degree of loudness inside the cabin of the Kicks, we set out on an impromptu back-to-back sound-level test of Nissan's latest SUV and a prime subcompact competitor, the 10Best-winning Chevrolet Trax. In addition to our usual 70-mph-cruise benchmark, we took measurements at 80 mph, as well as on two surfaces from the ride-quality test found on page 66: a coarse concrete road (at 30 mph) and broken asphalt (at 40 mph). In every case, the Trax is monumentally quieter. At 70 mph, the reading inside the Kicks is three decibels higher, a vast and instantly noticeable difference. To give you a sense of the significance of that gap, the disparity is the same between a Ram TRX and a Mercedes E-class. The gulf between the Trax and the Kicks widens on rougher surfaces, where the former is four decibels quieter and the latter's clattering suspension and ponging tires quickly become grating. While loudness doesn't necessarily translate to poor ride quality, the Bose audio system in the Kicks can't mask the hood flutter over rough roads or the quivers coming through the seat and steering wheel. Often, what you're paying for as you climb the price ladder is refinement, but the less expensive Trax proves that's not always true. —*Dave VanderWerp*

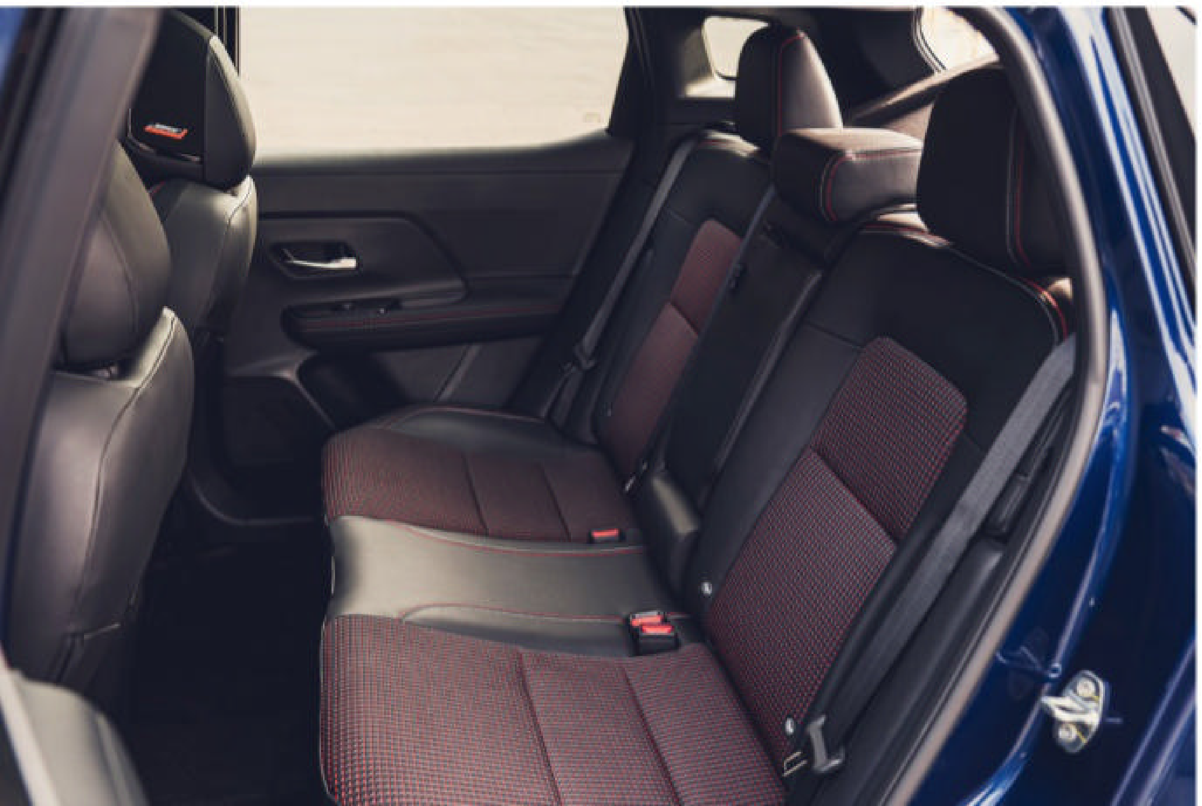
INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL (dBA)



It's a clean sweep for the Chevy, but the Nissan's lone advantage is an increase of only one decibel from 70 to 80 mph versus two for the Trax.

In Normal and Sport modes (there are also Eco and Snow settings; the latter is all-wheel drive only), flooring the Kicks from a dead stop prompts it to override the transmission's simulated gears, zinging the engine to a steady 6000-rpm groan. The result is a 9.0-second saunter to 60 mph and a lazy quarter-mile pass of 17.1 seconds at 82 mph. The quickest peer, the Mazda CX-30 Turbo, needs but 5.8 seconds to hit 60. Yet the Nissan is hardly an outlier in its class. The Honda HR-V and the Toyota Corolla Cross, for example, are slower still, and the outgoing Kicks needed 9.6 seconds to get to 60. Official fuel-economy estimates for the new Kicks don't suffer much, with the model's best EPA combined rating falling to 31 mpg, down from its predecessor's 33 mpg. Subtract 1 mpg more with all-wheel drive. That's not bad for the segment, though we averaged only 26 mpg overall, and the 33-mpg result in our 75-mph highway test is a 4-mpg drop from before.

The structure feels reasonably solid, and doors close with a satisfying thunk. Like the initially perky throttle response, the steering is quick off-center, lending the impression of sportiness. Skidpad grip on the Bridgestone



Rear-seat riders have more space than before, but only the front seats get headrests with integrated stereo speakers.

OPINION

COUNTERPOINTS

For a long time, Nissan has had some of the plushest armrests in the business, so soft you could almost lose your left arm in the padded shelf that was perfectly placed on the driver's door. On this latest Kicks, the armrest's best places have the softness of a sneaker insole, but in the worst spots, sadly, it's hard plastic under a thin vinyl overlay. Furthermore, the door armrests are styled to look like carbon-fiber-reinforced plastic, which is about the worst inspiration for an armrest we can think of. You might be initially distracted by the large high-resolution center screen, but a couple of hours in, your elbow will be booming as loud as the 10-speaker Bose audio.
—Dave VanderWerp

The Kicks has a couple of advantages over the 10Best-winning Chevrolet Trax. The Nissan's interior is arguably more attractive, and its biggest touchscreen is quite a bit larger. Another point in its favor is the availability of all-wheel drive, something the Trax doesn't offer at all. Unfortunately, those advantages are largely nullified when you get behind the wheel of the Kicks. The interior seems a lot less pleasant when the gritty sound of the road roars into the cabin, the engine thrashes and moans under duress, and sharp impacts have the suspension ringing like Zildjian's finest. And while you can get all-wheel drive, the Kicks isn't quick enough to necessitate the added traction under acceleration. At around $25K, we'd be more enthusiastic, but for $31,875 as tested, the Kicks is a hard sell.
—Tony Quiroga

Is the Nissan Kicks my favorite thing I've driven this year? Not even close. But I do think it might be one of the most important vehicles out there. With the average new-car price flirting with $50,000, affordable transportation like the Kicks gives a lot of people a chance to replace something worn out and rusty with something shiny and new. I think I'd like the mid-tier Kicks SV better than the SR. More reasonably priced, it includes the bigger screen with wireless phone capability and has smaller wheels that likely help it ride smoother than the SR with the optional 19s. Sure, there are better values—say, the Chevy Trax—but it's good to have options. Especially affordable ones.
—Austin Irwin

Alenza Sport A/S all-season tires is a decent 0.84 g, a slight improvement over the previous model, and the 176-foot stop from 70 mph is a meaningful 13 feet shorter than before. Body control is satisfactory given the compliant suspension's emphasis on ride comfort and wheel travel. But the Kicks is no running shoe. The steering quickly goes numb and fails to deliver increased effort as you turn in to corners. Traverse larger bumps in our big-wheeled test car, and sharp impacts thwack the cabin as if it were a subwoofer enclosure. Smaller, less flashy rolling stock might be advised.

Settle in with your earplugs, and the interior is generally comfortable and spacious, with straightforward ergonomics and pleasant adornments. The SR trim's orange accents and fake carbon-fiber trim across the dash and doors help draw your eyes away from cheaper-looking bits. Despite the cabin's increased dimensions in almost every direction, including about an inch and a half more width to swing your elbows about, the interior volume is unchanged at 94 cubic feet (models without a sunroof are slightly larger inside). Front legroom shrinks by an inch versus the outgoing model, but rear legroom is up a smidgen more than that. In practice, this five-foot-11 pilot found enough real estate to sit behind his seat in acceptable comfort. Nissan's supportive Zero Gravity seat construction underpins not only the front chairs, as before, but the rear seats as well. Just don't go looking for any power or lumbar adjustments up front, because there aren't any.

Another demerit: Many of our test car's fancier amenities—a leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob, wireless phone mirroring, heated front seats and steering wheel—are only available in the higher trims, if not exclusive to the $27,570 SR. Similarly, only the SR is available with a Bose stereo with 10 speakers, including two in each front headrest. It's also the lone trim to get dual 12.3-inch monitors for instrumentation and infotainment, both of which are crisply rendered and easy to navigate (mid-level SV models feature the big touchscreen but step down to a 7.0-inch gauge display that's shared with the base S trim, which makes do with a 7.0-inch center screen).

Nissan's ProPilot Assist active-safety software is an SR exclusive too. But its lane tracking on the highway lacks discipline, and it frequently prods you to put a hand on the wheel. The tech is somewhat helpful in slow-moving bumper-to-bumper traffic, but we often turned it off and relied on lighter assistance from the standard adaptive cruise control, automated emergency braking, blind-spot monitoring, and lane-departure warning.

Keep things simple, and the rough edges should be less abrasive than they are on our $31,875 test car. We've yet to evaluate a front-wheel-drive SV model, but at $25,070, it seems like a sweeter spot in the Kicks lineup, one that would still have plenty of cold-weather traction when fitted with a good set of winter tires. Yet when this subcompact SUV is viewed purely as a budget proposition, the issue becomes the 10Best-winning Chevrolet Trax, which brings greater levels of refinement at an even thriftier $21,495 base price. That's a problem for the new Kicks.

The SR's ProPilot Assist aids highway driving, but it proved finicky. Our observed 33-mpg highway figure is 1 mpg short of the EPA estimate but betters some rivals.

2025 Nissan Kicks SR AWD

PRICE
As Tested $31,875
Base $29,070

Vehicle Type: front-engine, all-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door wagon
Options: Premium package, $1950; 19-inch wheels, $605; splash guards, $250
Infotainment: 12.3-inch touchscreen; wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay; satellite radio (3 months included); 4 USB-C (2 for power only) and Bluetooth inputs; Bose stereo, 10 speakers

ENGINE
inline-4, aluminum block and head
Bore x Stroke 3.31 x 3.55 in, 84.0 x 90.1 mm
Displacement 122 in^3,1997 cm^3
Compression Ratio 11.7:1
Fuel Delivery: direct injection
Valve Gear: double overhead cams, 4 valves per cylinder, variable intake- and exhaust-valve timing
Redline 6400 rpm
Power 141 hp @ 6000 rpm
Torque 140 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm

DRIVETRAIN
Transmission: continuously variable automatic
Final-Drive Ratio 5.34:1
All-Wheel-Drive System: full time with automatic rear-axle engagement

CHASSIS
unit-construction
Body Material: steel stampings

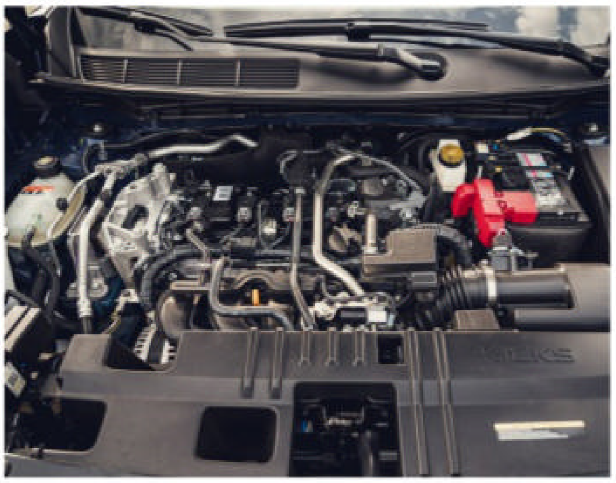
STEERING
rack-and-pinion with variable electric power assist
Ratio 19.7:1
Turns Lock-to-Lock 2.7
Turning Circle Curb-to-Curb 34.8 ft

SUSPENSION
F: ind; strut located by a lower control arm; coil springs; anti-roll bar
R: ind; strut located by 1 trailing link, 1 diagonal link, and a toe-control link per side; coil springs; anti-roll bar

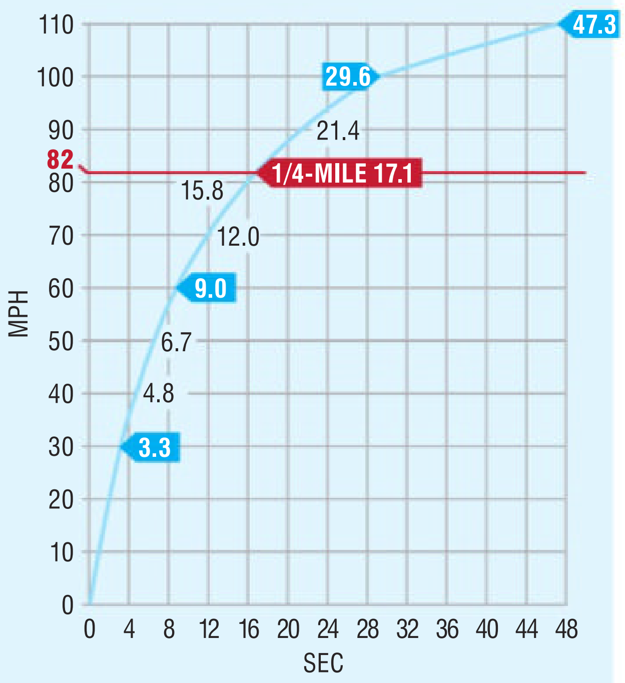
BRAKES
F: 11.6 x 1.0-in vented disc, 1-piston sliding caliper
R: 11.0 x 0.4-in disc, 1-piston sliding caliper
Stability Control: partially defeatable

WHEELS AND TIRES
Wheels: cast aluminum, 7.5 x 19 in
Tires: Bridgestone Alenza Sport A/S, 225/45R-19 92W M+S

DIMENSIONS
Wheelbase 104.9 in
Length 171.9 in
Width 70.9 in
Height 64.0 in
Front Track 61.4 in
Rear Track 61.5 in
Passenger Volume, F/R 53/41 ft^3
Cargo Volume Behind F/R 50/24 ft^3
Approach Angle 18.0°
Break-Over Angle 19.3°
Departure Angle 26.7°
Ground Clearance 8.4 in



TEST RESULTS
Acceleration



Results in graph omit 1-ft rollout of 0.4 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph 9.8 sec
Top Gear, 30–50 mph 4.8 sec
Top Gear, 50–70 mph 6.5 sec
Top Speed (*C/D* est) 120 mph

Handling
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad 0.84 g
Understeer: minimal

Braking
70–0 mph 176 ft
Fade: slight

Weight
Curb 3322 lb
Per Horsepower 23.6 lb
Distribution, F/R 61.0/39.0%

Fuel
Capacity 12.4 gal
Octane 87

***C/D* Fuel Economy and Range**
Observed 26 mpg
75-mph Hwy Driving/Range 33 mpg/400 mi

EPA Fuel Economy
Comb/City/Hwy 30/27/34 mpg

Interior Sound Level
Idle 39 dBA
Full Throttle 77 dBA
70-mph Cruising 73 dBA

Tested by Mike Sutton in Chelsea, MI

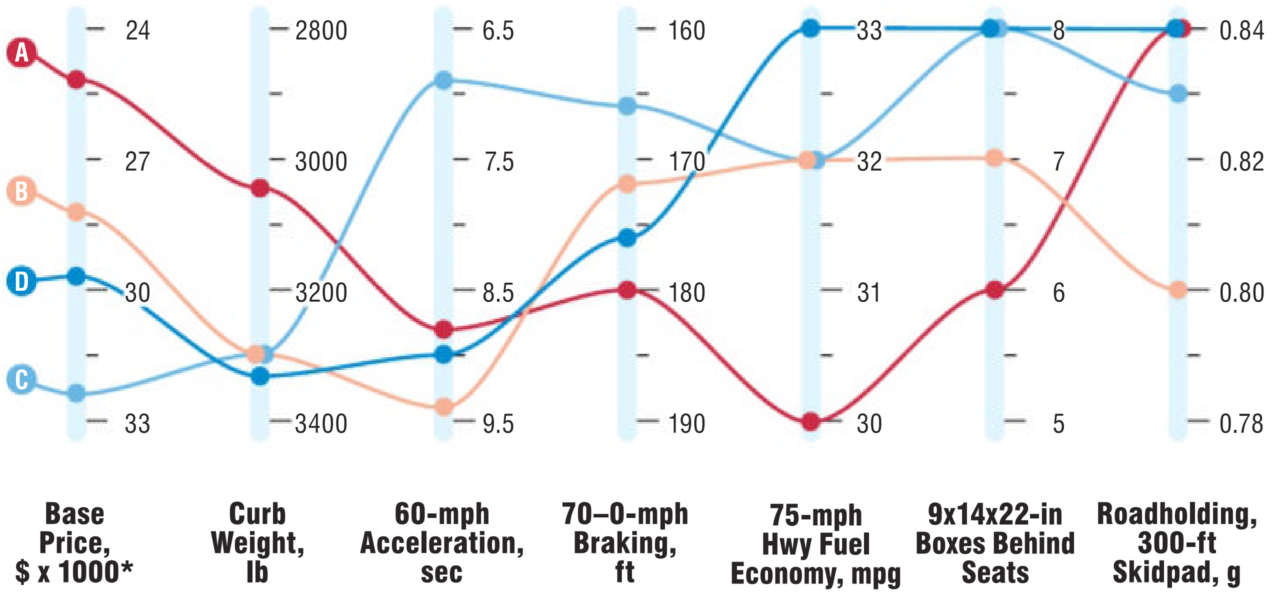
COMPETITORS
Small fries.

Ⓐ **Chevrolet Trax Activ**
137-hp 1.2-L I-3, 6-sp auto

Ⓑ **Honda HR-V EX-L AWD**
158-hp 2.0-L I-4, CVT

Ⓒ **Kia Seltos SX AWD**
195-hp 1.6-L I-4, 8-sp auto

Ⓓ **Nissan Kicks AWD**
141-hp 2.0-L I-4, CVT



*Includes performance-enhancing options.

Suspensions

An in-depth look into how modern suspensions manage our broken roads.

by Dave VanderWerp

# of Disbelief

photography by Michael Simari

This stitched image depicts how dramatically the Taycan's active suspension moves up and down over lumpy surfaces to keep its body level.

It's easy to say a vehicle rides well but much more difficult to explain the nuanced implications of that highly subjective statement. It's harder still to do the design, engineering, and tuning work to make a vehicle thrive in the numerous circumstances it can encounter. Doing so involves far more than just tuning springs and dampers; engineers select the properties of each rubber suspension bushing and powertrain or subframe mount, not to mention wheel and tire properties, and must create a solid vehicle structure upon which to hang these subsystems. The more you dig into how and why vehicles ride the way they do, the more the complexities will blow you away.

The essence of good ride means filtering out whatever the tires encounter so that the occupants feel as little of those disturbances from the road surface as possible. Then again, ride comfort is only one of many attributes that make up a vehicle's character. Is it worth trading racetrack performance for a better ride? That depends on the goals for that vehicle and the segment in which it plays. For a luxury sedan? Coddle away. For a sports car? Let's go with the 1.2-g setup.

A computer may be an engineer's preferred traveling companion, and this one rode shotgun for the better part of a day in each vehicle to gather the data for this test.

In this test, we wanted to get past empty platitudes and dig deep into the complexities of ride quality, so we gathered a quintet of vehicles and called Cayman Dynamics, an independent engineering firm that does testing for various automakers; many years ago they helped us quantify handling for a best-handling test. And, like that test, measuring ride is anything but straightforward. When an impact feels objectionable, are you sure you're feeling it and not hearing it? Is it buzzing the floor, the seat, the steering wheel, or maybe the center console where your arm is resting? That's why we wanted the Cayman Dynamics crew's expertise in terms of both how to take ride measurements and, even more important, how to interpret the data.

A group of *C/D* editors drove all the cars back to back on several challenging area roads to get the subjective juices flowing, while the instrumentation and measurements were done inside the confines of Stellantis's nearby Chelsea Proving Grounds. That's where we do our typical performance testing, but for this evaluation, we used a different set of roads designed to rattle the suspensions of our chosen vehicles.

Although it's dramatically outpriced in this group—the next car on the ladder costs more than three times as much—the Honda Accord is a great benchmark (which is why it's on our 10Best list). It doesn't employ any fancy ride tech, other than the smallest- and lightest-in-test 17-

UNSPRUNG HEROES

The weight of the wheel-and-tire assemblies is unsprung mass, which means it's part of the small proportion of a vehicle's weight that doesn't rest atop its suspension. All other things being equal, larger and heavier wheels with stiffer and narrower sidewalls are more difficult to tame over choppy roads, so we weighed our entrants' wheel-and-tire assemblies to gauge how much of a battle each vehicle is fighting to create a blissful ride.

Vehicle	Tire Size	Wheel and Tire Weight
Chevrolet Corvette	245/35ZR-19 (run-flat) 305/30ZR-20 (run-flat)	53 68
Ford F-150 Raptor R	37x12.50R-17LT	103
Honda Accord EX	225/50R-17	49
Porsche Taycan Turbo S	265/35R-21 305/30R-21	60 69
Rolls-Royce Spectre	255/40R-23 (foam lined) 295/35R-23 (foam lined)	90 99

The Vehicles

We wanted to look at a wide cross section of what's on sale today, with vastly different price points, technologies, body styles, and intended missions. It should go without saying that these are by no means comparable vehicles, but we selected each of them based on our positive subjective experience with their ride comfort.

2025 PORSCHE TAYCAN TURBO S
As-Tested Price: $237,395
The just-launched Porsche Active Ride, also available on the Panamera E-Hybrid, is one of the only truly active suspensions on sale today. What kind of ride-quality magic can it deliver?
Notable Suspension Technology:
Active and adaptive dampers, air springs

2024 HONDA ACCORD EX
As-Tested Price: $31,005
We chose this longtime 10Best winner to see how a supremely well-executed mainstream sedan with a passive suspension and an entry-level price point stacks up.
Notable Suspension Technology:
Passive dampers

2024 FORD F-150 RAPTOR R
As-Tested Price: $114,550
The Raptor's extended suspension travel and knobby tires can take it just about anywhere, so dealing with routine broken pavement should be a cinch.
Notable Suspension Technology:
Adaptive dampers

2024 CHEVROLET CORVETTE STINGRAY Z51
As-Tested Price: $95,405
Ride comfort might not be the top association with this tenacious performer, but the Corvette is one of the best-riding sports cars.
Notable Suspension Technology:
Magnetorheological dampers

2024 ROLLS-ROYCE SPECTRE
As-Tested Price: $501,575
An extravagant electric coupe from a brand known for its plushness executed to a half-million-dollar price point. Should be pretty good, right?
Notable Suspension Technology: Adaptive dampers, air springs, active anti-roll bars

The Corvette, shown here fleeing what could be a sinkhole, is particularly adept at absorbing ugly pavement when its magnetorheological dampers are set to Tour mode.

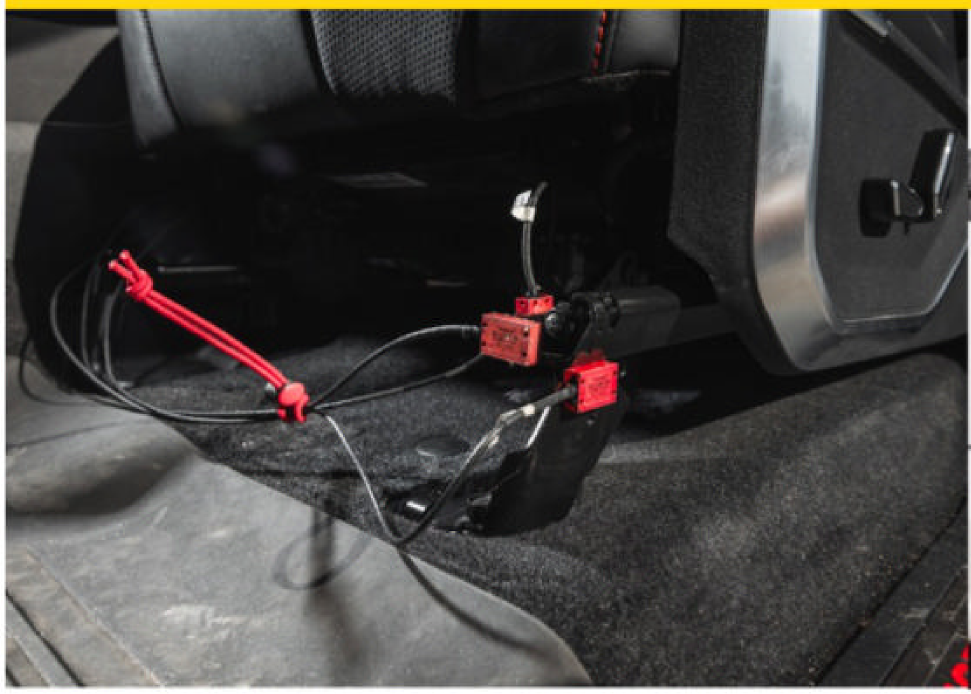
inch wheels and tires, nor does it hide behind any sound-isolation sleight of hand. Although you feel the road texture and roughness, the Accord dances over it with sophistication and composure.

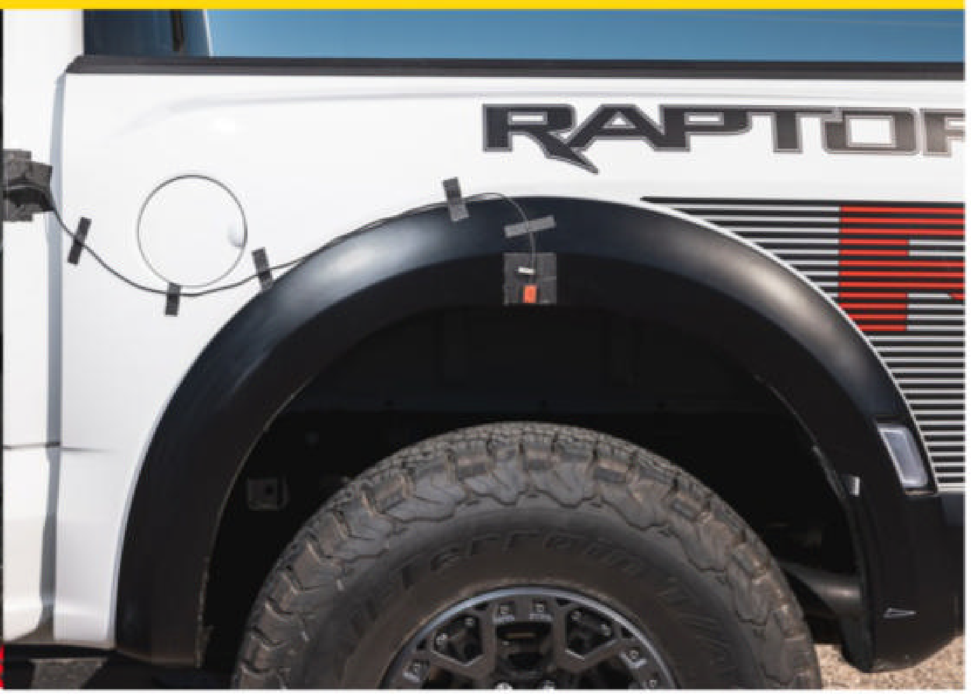
We're perpetually impressed at how well the latest Chevrolet Corvette rides, given its level of cornering prowess. Its incredible bandwidth is partly enabled by magnetorheological (MR) dampers. When the Corvette is driven gently in Tour mode, its body moves around more than most sports cars' bodies do; Sport cinches that excess motion, and Track means track, where all ride-quality concerns are discarded. "We don't focus on what Track mode feels like on public roads," says Mike Hurley, General Motors' MR tuning guru. The Vette's sports-car-stiff bushings and small run-flat sidewalls generally made for more impact harshness compared with the rest of this group, but the fact that the ride is close to or better than the Accord's in places is a big win.

The bellow from the Ford F-150 Raptor R's supercharged V-8 is what usually captivates us, but after this exercise, we have to say the truck's quietness and refinement are even more remarkable. How do these knobby all-terrain tires not roar annoyingly at speed? And highway thumps are far away from the driver, nearly Rolls-Royce

THE TEST GEAR

The Cayman Dynamics attached six accelerometers to each vehicle: two on the body, one each above the front- and rear-axle centerlines; three on the driver's seat track (for fore-and-aft, side-to-side, and up-and-down measurements); and one on the passenger's seat track. Normally, they would also mount one to the steering column, but removing the shrouds risked damaging our loaner vehicles. The sensors are attached with hot glue, which works when assessing frequencies up to about 50 hertz. Above that point, you need a more positive connection, so they use dental cement.

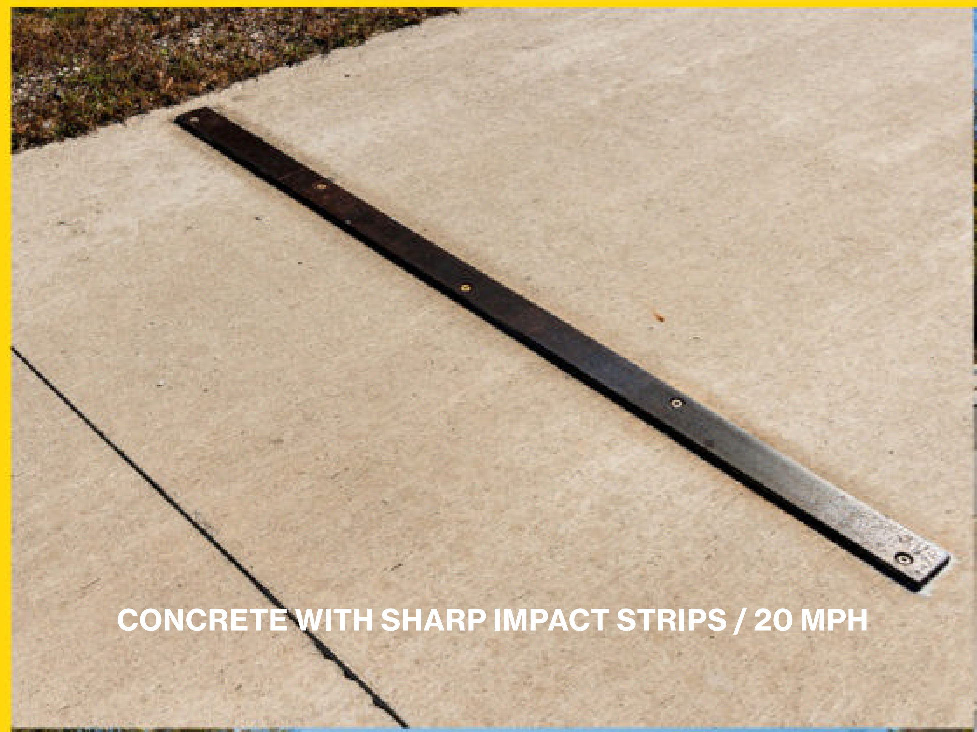




BROKEN CONCRETE AND BROKEN ASHPALT: STEPHEN CROSS

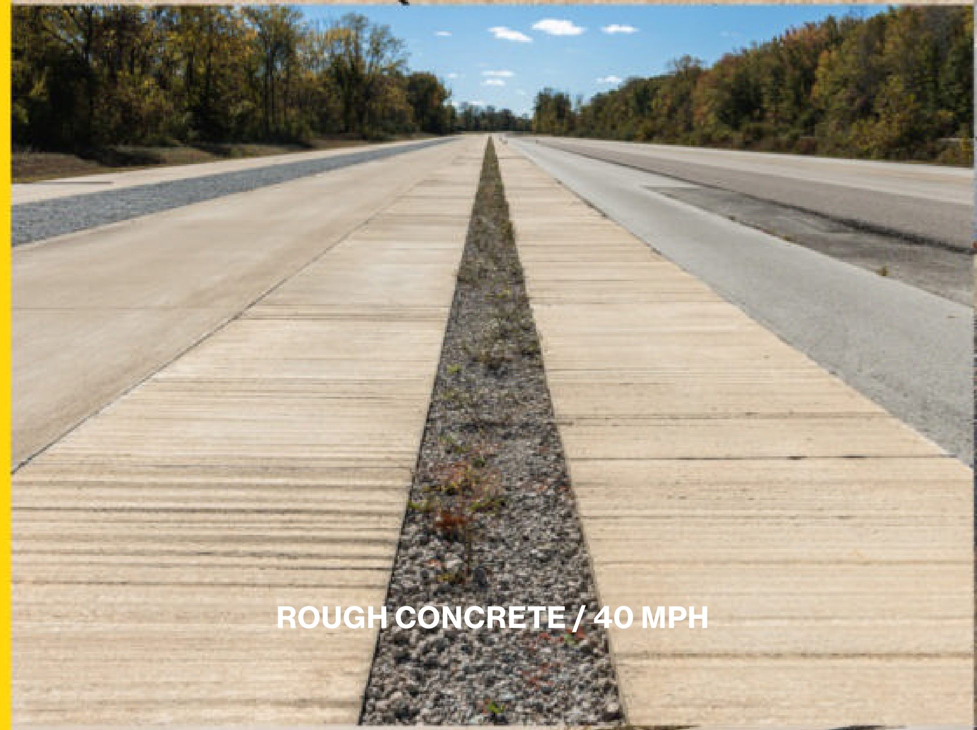
The Test Roads

Although bad roads are plentiful in our home state of Michigan, all of the surfaces used for instrumented testing were inside the high fencing of Stellantis's Chelsea Proving Grounds to ensure repeatability of both the road condition and the chosen test speeds.

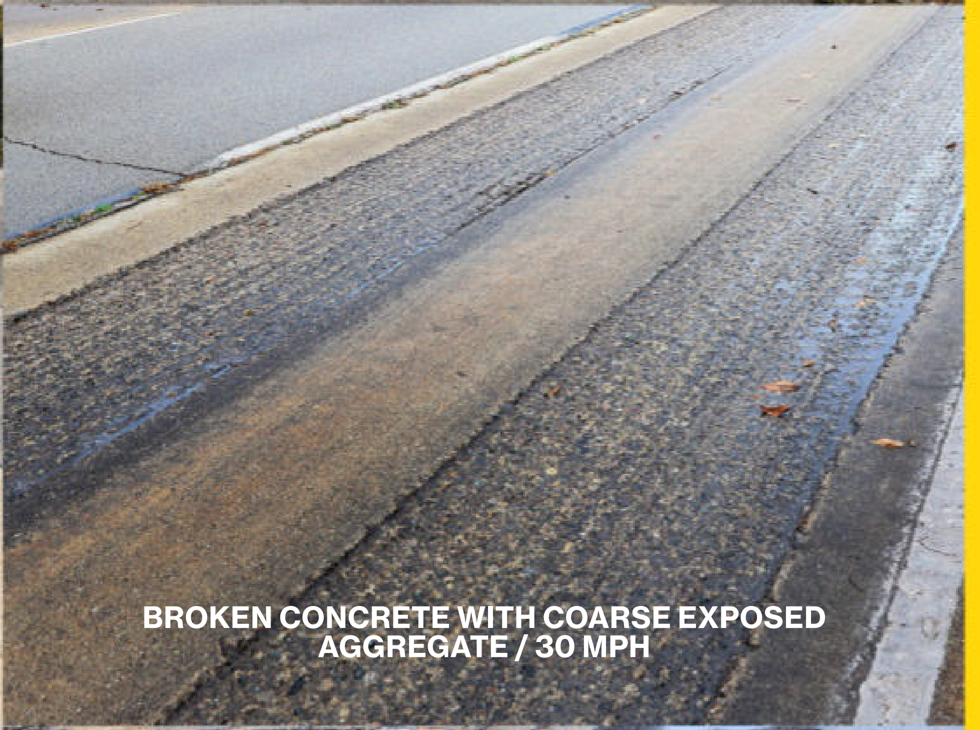


CONCRETE WITH SHARP IMPACT STRIPS / 20 MPH

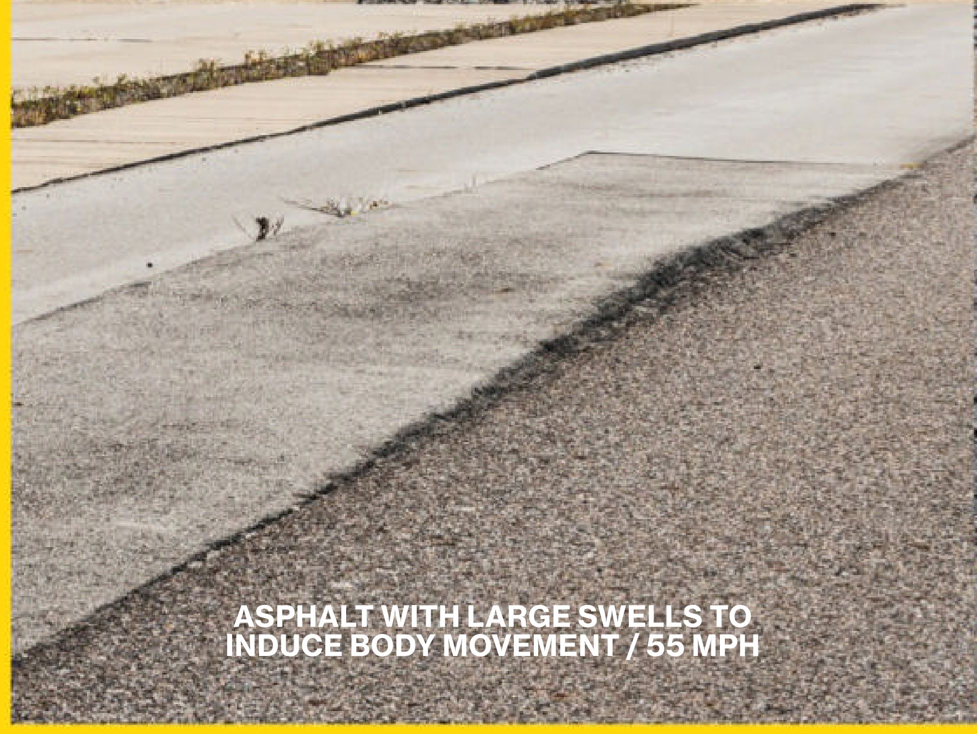
SMOOTH ASPHALT / 50 MPH



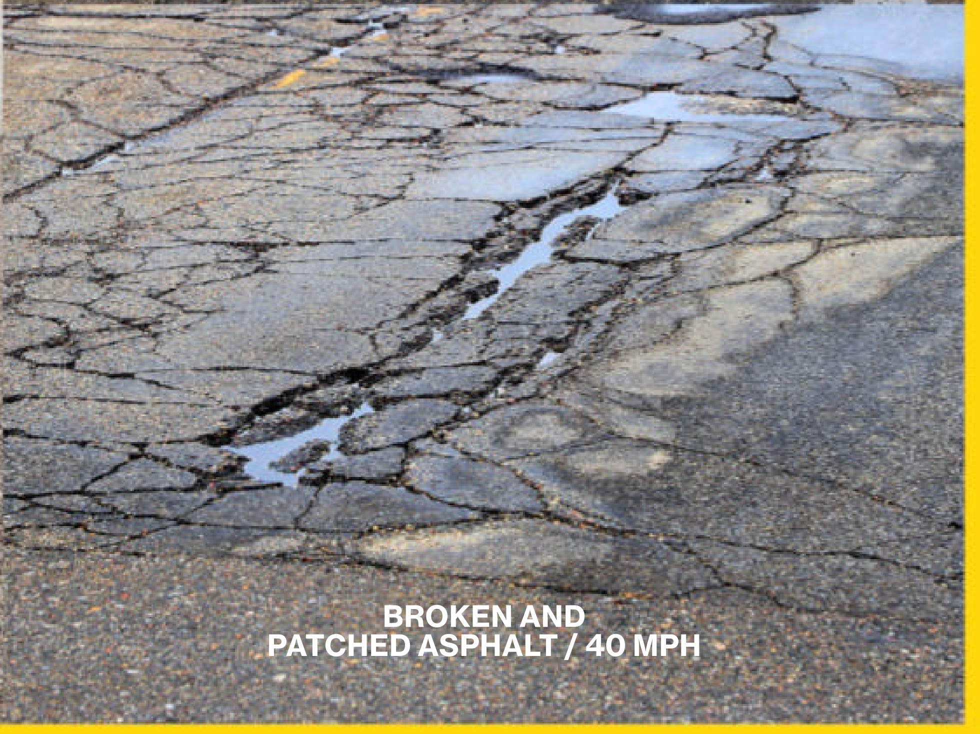
ROUGH CONCRETE / 40 MPH



BROKEN CONCRETE WITH COARSE EXPOSED AGGREGATE / 30 MPH



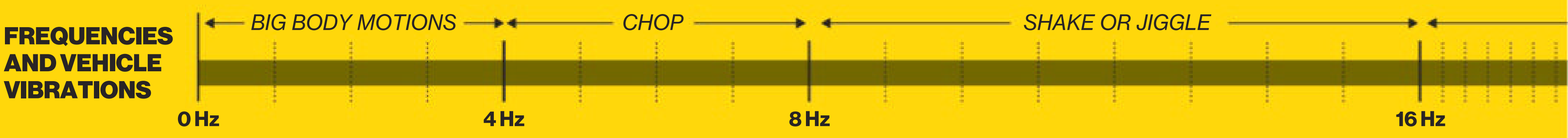
ASPHALT WITH LARGE SWELLS TO INDUCE BODY MOVEMENT / 55 MPH



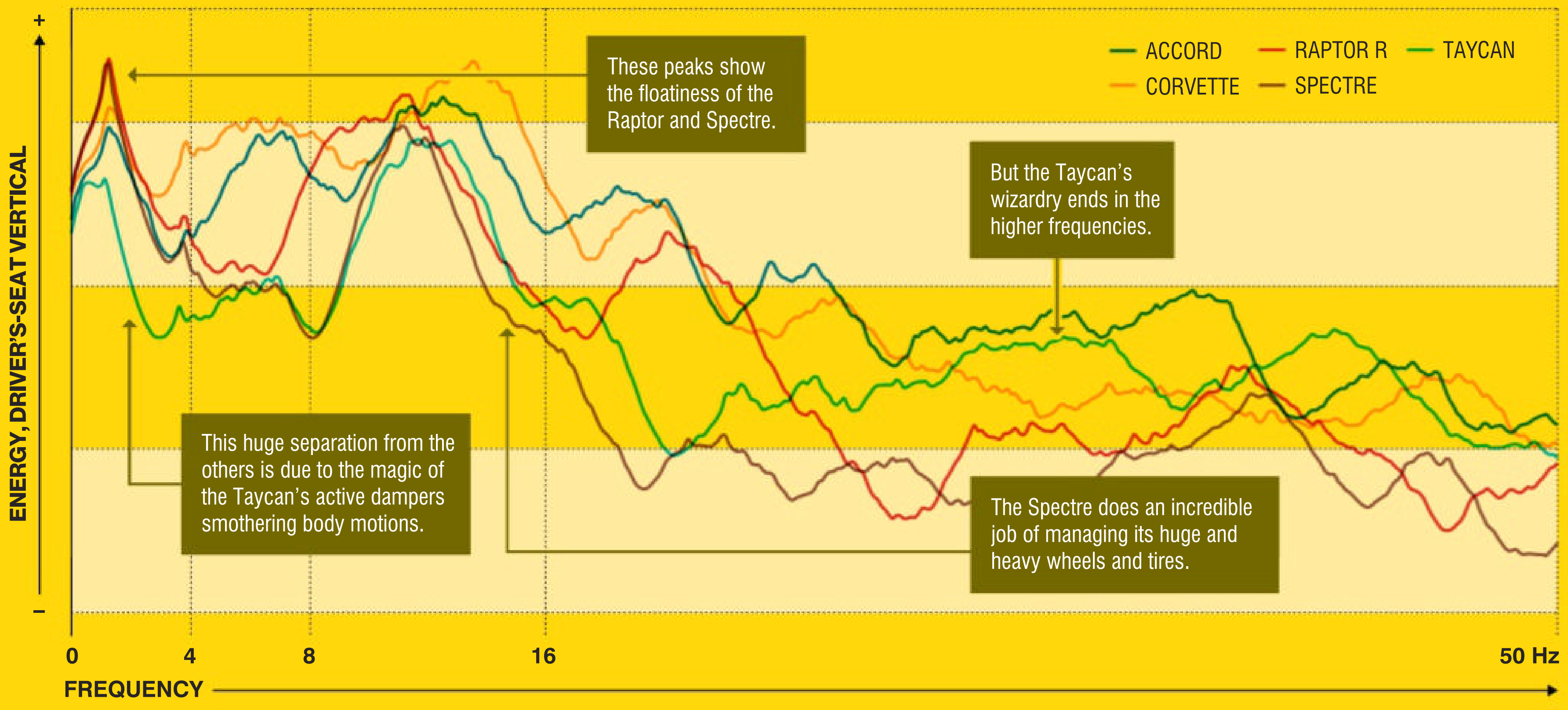
BROKEN AND PATCHED ASPHALT / 40 MPH

The Data

These plots show frequency on the X-axis and the amount of energy (on a logarithmic scale) on the Y-axis. Below four hertz is primary ride; these are the big body motions that if uncontrolled could cause you to feel seasick. The next band, from four to eight hertz, is chop, which is often wheels and tires resonating over impacts. From eight to 16 hertz is shake or jiggle, which is what you might feel in certain body parts when subjected to these frequencies. Above that point is more of a buzz. In general, the area under the curve in each zone equates to which one feels best, but a particularly high spike can make a vehicle stand out negatively, even if the overall energy level is lower than another one. With hundreds of possible plots to choose from, we picked a few that we found most illuminating.



Broken Asphalt



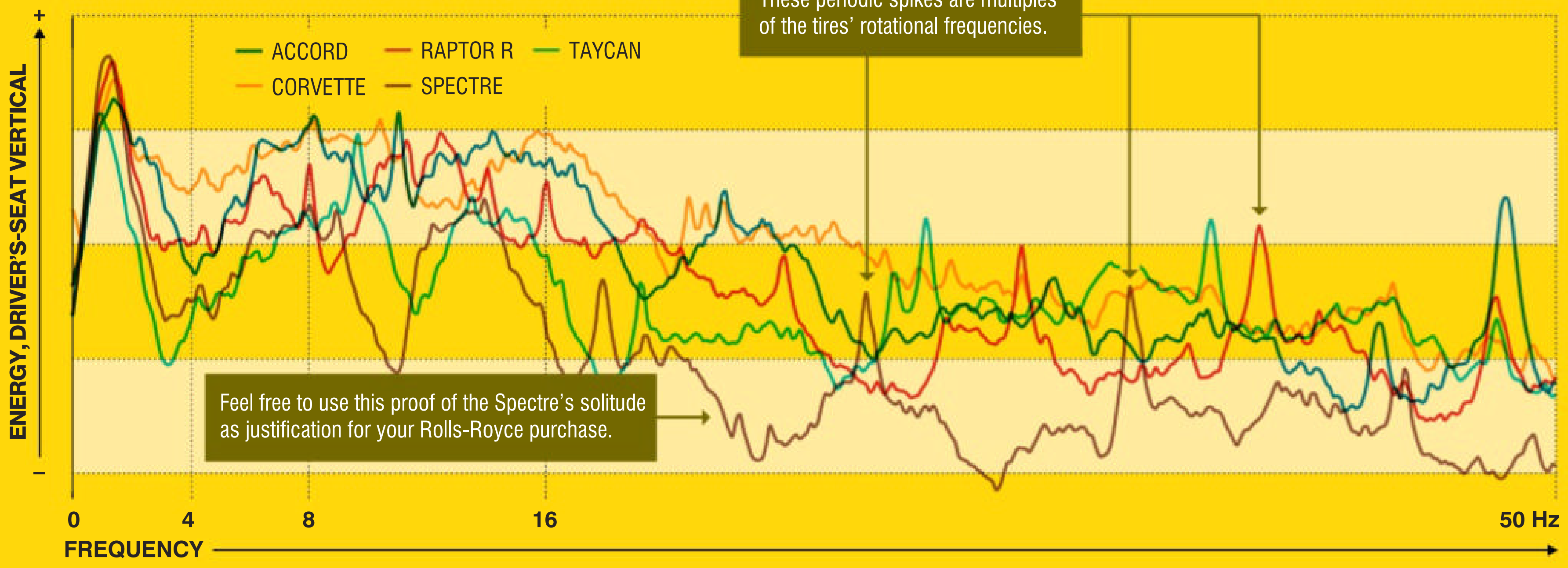
These peaks show the floatiness of the Raptor and Spectre.

But the Taycan's wizardry ends in the higher frequencies.

This huge separation from the others is due to the magic of the Taycan's active dampers smothering body motions.

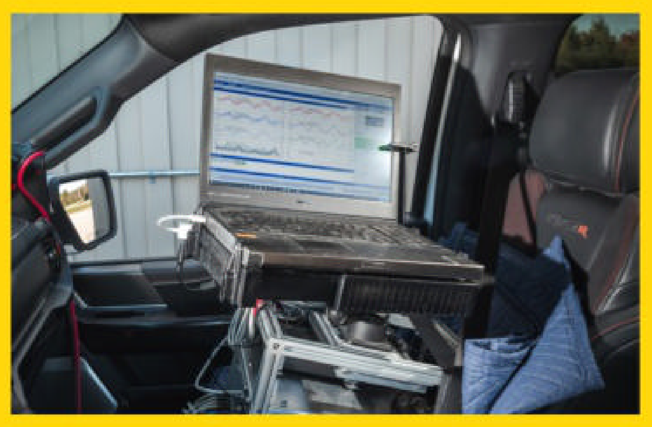
The Spectre does an incredible job of managing its huge and heavy wheels and tires.

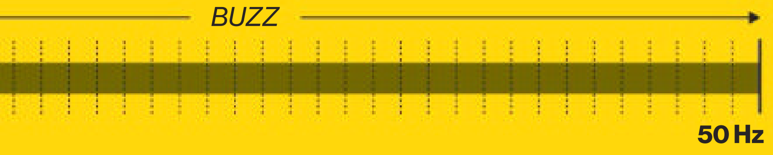
Smooth Road



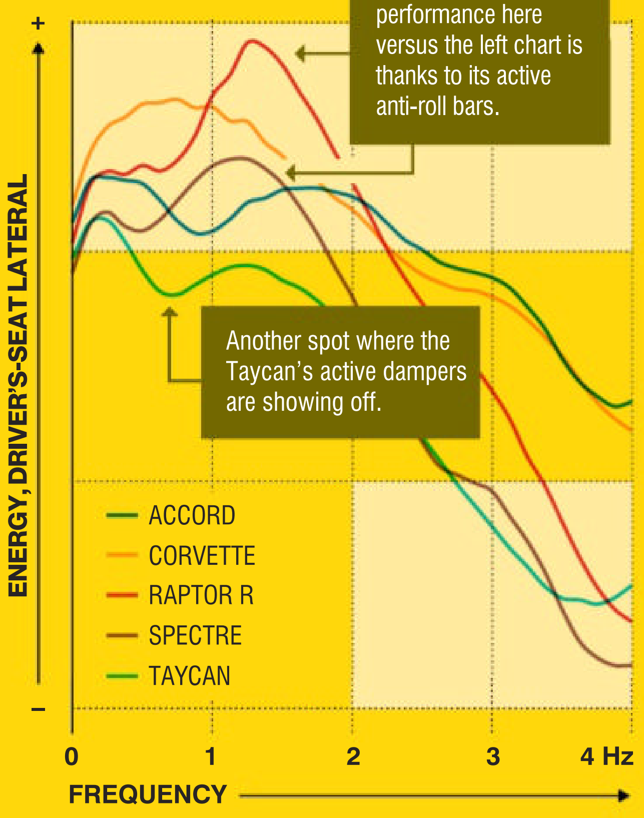
These periodic spikes are multiples of the tires' rotational frequencies.

Feel free to use this proof of the Spectre's solitude as justification for your Rolls-Royce purchase.





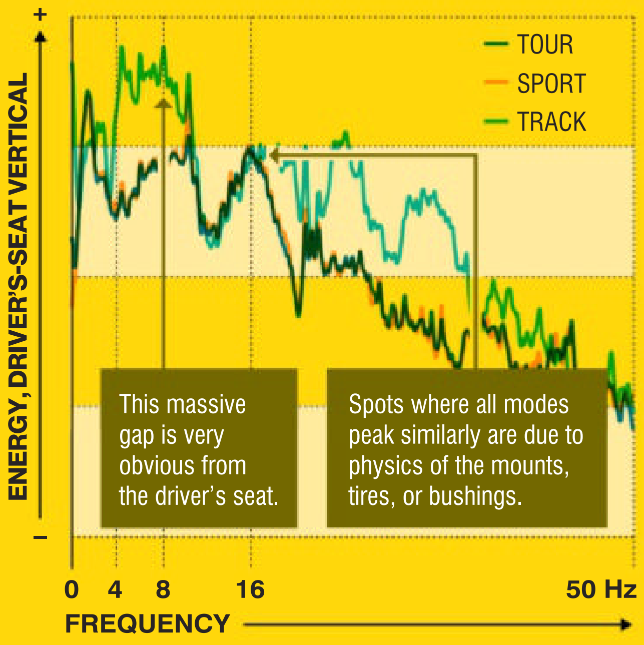
Large Swells



Hello, Raptor head toss. The Spectre's relatively better performance here versus the left chart is thanks to its active anti-roll bars.

Another spot where the Taycan's active dampers are showing off.

Corvette Mode Comparison (Smooth Road)



This massive gap is very obvious from the driver's seat.

Spots where all modes peak similarly are due to physics of the mounts, tires, or bushings.

INFOGRAPHICS BY NICOLAS RAPP

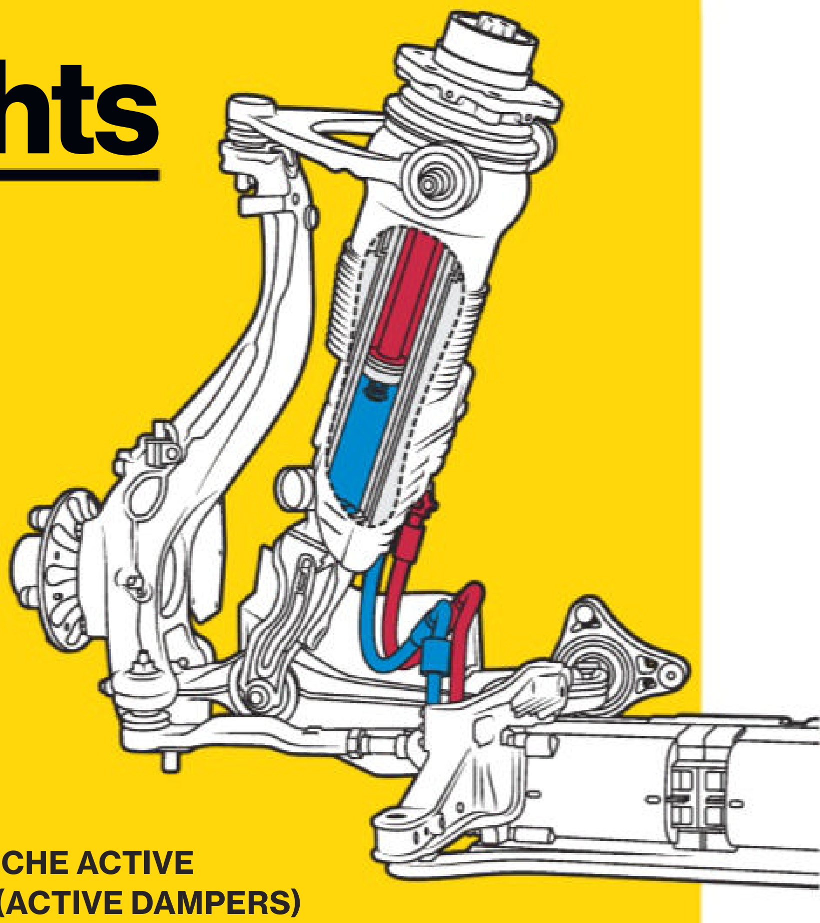
Rapper Tyga spits vehicle-dynamics truth when he says "Too much rim make the ride too hard."

distant. Sure, the Raptor has some body-on-frame jiggles, and when hustled down a curvy two-lane road, it causes head toss (head movements not in sync with the torso) and the most steering-column shake. But in other spots, such as on coarse pavement or during sharp impacts, its ability to filter out the hits is second only to the Spectre's.

The latest Porsche Taycan and Panamera E-Hybrid have an optional active suspension, one of only two such systems on the market today, so we were eager to sink our accelerometers into it to see what magic it enables. In short, the system can keep the body eerily flat. Over the test surface with large lumps, it feels like the body moves less than half as much as the next-best vehicle. Also, on one of our favorite pockmarked two-lane roads, the Taycan feels pulled taut to the road but with no ride penalty as the wheels and tires are frantically working away. But physics can't be defied, and on mostly smooth roads, the Taycan's suspension bangs loudly over sharp impacts and highway seams. Our takeaway: The worse the road, the better the Taycan feels.

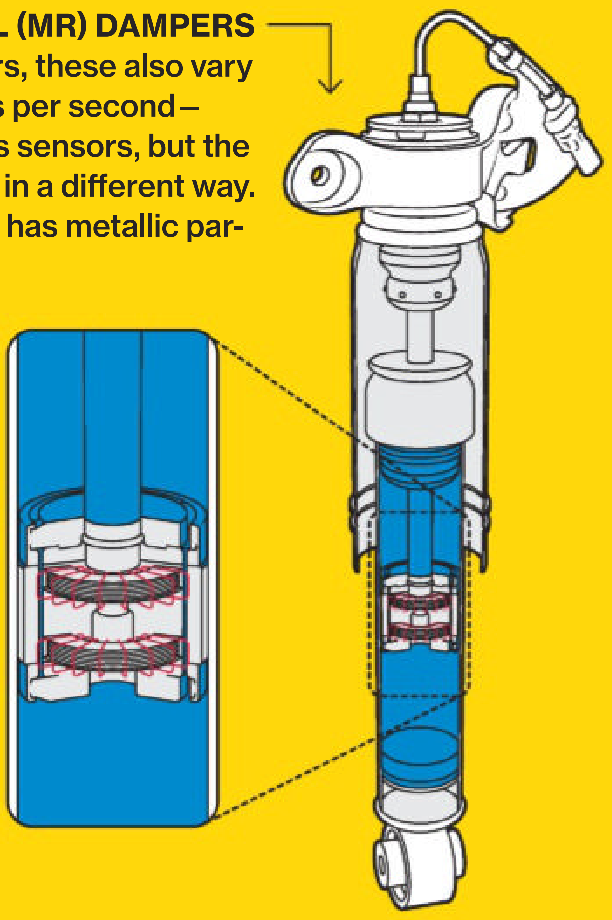
Technology Highlights

Here is the key ride-quality tech found on our five test vehicles. Each of these adapts wheel control to the road surface based on input from various onboard sensors. Even tech that has been around a while, such as MR dampers, continues to get smarter with better compensation for temperature and other factors, because wheels keep getting larger, but ride can't suffer.



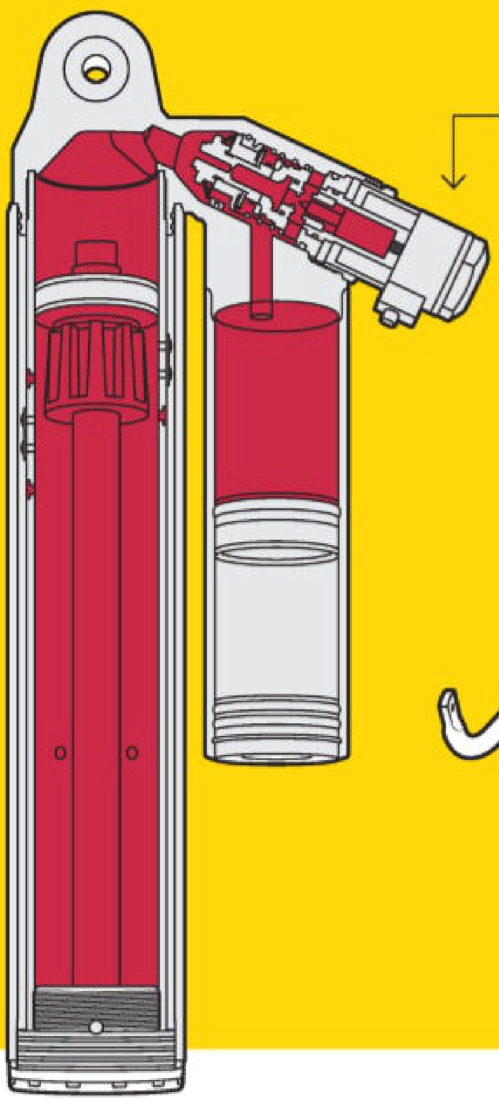
MAGNETORHEOLOGICAL (MR) DAMPERS

Like other adaptive dampers, these also vary damping—up to 1000 times per second—based on input from various sensors, but the adjustments are controlled in a different way. With MR dampers, the fluid has metallic particles in it, and applying a magnetic field causes them to clump together, which resists movement and increases damping. This method tends to create more damping bandwidth than the valve-based adaptive units and also allows the adjustments to happen before there's appreciable suspension movement.



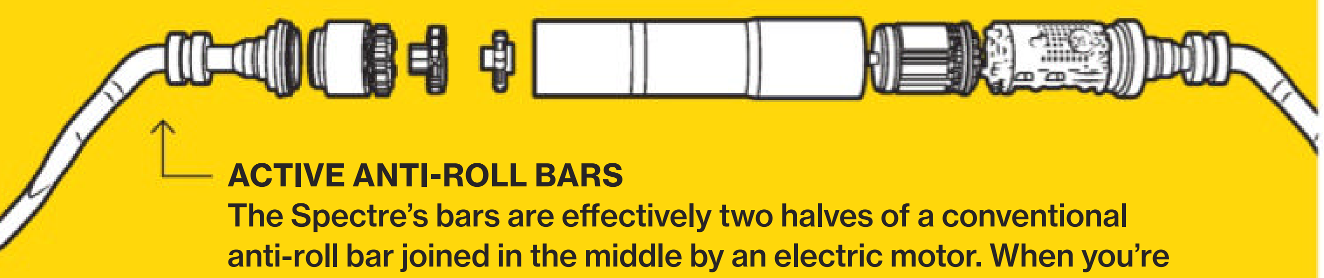
PORSCHE ACTIVE RIDE (ACTIVE DAMPERS)

These multitalented dampers are, at their core, two-valve adaptive units, which handle the highest-speed impacts such as sharp bumps and seams. But the active part is the ability for an electric motor and pump for each corner to force fluid above or below the damper's piston to raise or lower it at will to control body movements. They work in conjunction with air springs, which support the vehicle's weight while parked. But at speed, the air springs deflate, and the dampers take over almost all the spring and damping duties.



ADAPTIVE DAMPERS

These provide continuously variable damping that's adjusted based on sensors and controlled by a valve that can open or restrict the passage the fluid flows through. The Spectre, the Taycan, and the Raptor R each have two such valves to control compression and rebound damping separately. This split capability is new for the 2024 Raptor's Fox Dual Live Valve dampers (left), which also have external reservoirs on the rear units and the ability to allow the flow of huge amounts of fluid to absorb the impacts of airborne adventures.



ACTIVE ANTI-ROLL BARS

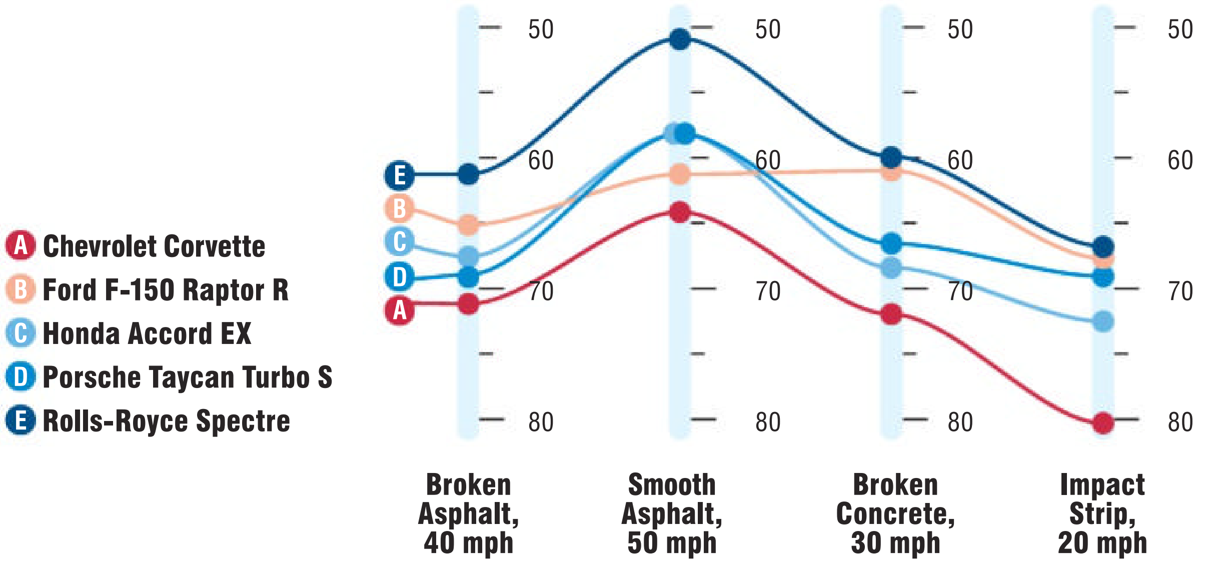
The Spectre's bars are effectively two halves of a conventional anti-roll bar joined in the middle by an electric motor. When you're driving straight, the bars disconnect for maximum comfort—minimizing head toss that hitting a bump with one wheel can induce—and the electric motor adds torque to the anti-roll-bar ends in proportion to the cornering rate to resist roll.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRIS PHILPOT

THE SOUND OF COMPLIANCE

Studies have shown that humans' perception of ride quality and sound are inextricably linked, especially for nonexpert evaluators. Tire ponging and suspension rattling over broken pavement factor into an occupant's judgment of ride smoothness. While the data from our accelerometers isn't so easily influenced, we took sound-level readings over a few test surfaces to quantify the vehicle-to-vehicle differences. On smooth concrete, the Spectre's serene cabin has nearly five times less sound pressure than the Corvette's. But over the rough stuff, the Raptor came into its own and was, in some cases, a close second to the Rolls-Royce.

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL (dBA)



The decibel scale is logarithmic, so small differences reflect a big change. A 10-decibel increase generally equates to a sound that's twice as loud.

No other automaker leans into float and plushness like Rolls-Royce. That's a literal statement, as the softly sprung Rolls-Royce Spectre does a lot of listing. Some of us disliked the roly-poly motions more than others, but we could all agree about a few things. When the Spectre is quiet, it's so serene that it could be confused with a hermetically sealed magic carpet. The difference in interior sound level between the Spectre and the Corvette (the loudest participant) on the smooth test surface is practically the difference between a whisper and a shout. In terms of chop, shake, and the higher frequencies, the Spectre does an uncanny job of managing its largest-in-test 23-inch wheels and tires. Thumps from patchy highways are so far away from the driver's ear that they sound like someone else's problem, which may be a recurring theme in the lives of those able to plunk down half a million dollars on a car.

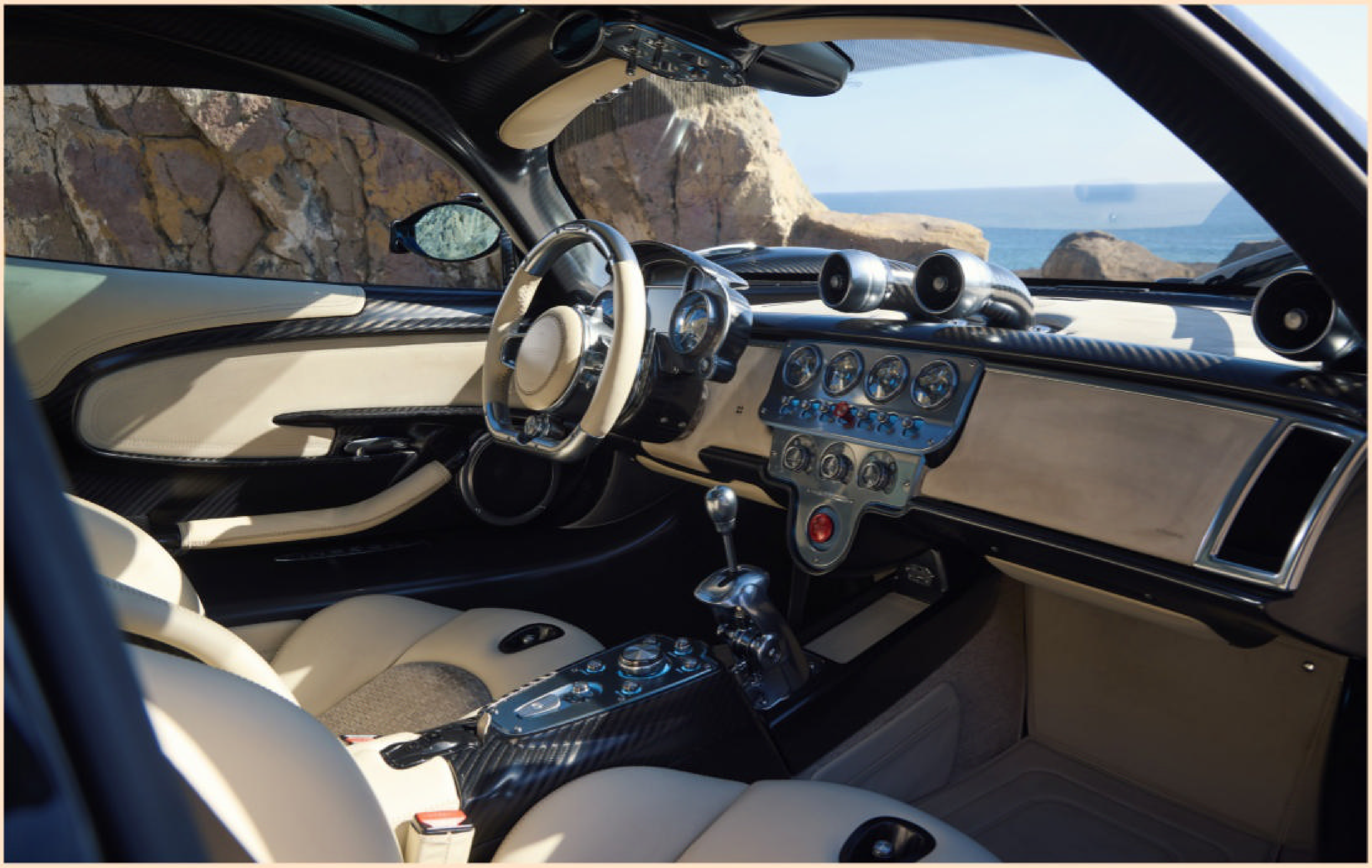
After all of those tests, what have we learned? Measuring ride objectively is extremely complicated, so much so that many automakers continue to rely primarily on subjective evaluation. And while sometimes the data seems to support what we felt, other times it leaves us scratching our heads. But we've certainly quantified our appreciation of today's technologies that enable both better ride and more adjustability. The roads aren't getting better. Thankfully, suspension technology is helping smooth things out. ■

A DIGEST OF TESTS, UNFETTERED OPINIONS, AND SOME INTERESTING MINUTIAE

Drivelines

Art in the Machine

Part sculpture, part supercar, the **Pagani Utopia** is also more than the sum of its parts.



HORACIO PAGANI IS A visionary designer and self-taught engineer. He is also a master of carbon-fiber manufacturing, which is why his cars are so strong, light, and eye-catching. His command of the material is so complete that it is a shame to paint over any of it, which is why many buyers are choosing a mere tint for Pagani's latest creation, the Utopia, so you can see how all the fibers are aligned. It is beautiful enough to hang on a wall.

The Utopia is also frighteningly quick, not least because it weighs roughly 3100 pounds and gets moved around by a twin-turbo 6.0-liter V-12 that makes 852 horsepower and 811 pound-feet of torque. The M158 is a Mercedes-AMG engine built exclusively for Pagani to its specifications, which include titanium components, smaller turbos to reduce lag, modified intercoolers, and a dry-sump oiling system. The V-12 sends this prodigious power to an Xtrac seven-speed automated manual transaxle (a traditional manual is available), which functions like a racing gearbox in that it has a transversely oriented gearset to keep it more compact. But the Pagani gears are helical instead of straight-cut to reduce whine.

At an estimated 3.1 seconds, the Utopia's 60-mph time is not as quick as it might be since the single-clutch gearbox's one-two upshift interrupts the power flow. With only two tires responsible for 852 horsepower, getting the launch just right is a practiced art. Even though the rest of the world has abandoned it, Horacio Pagani is sticking with the single-clutch gearbox because it's lighter than a dual-clutch setup. Also, he believes that one should feel upshifts and the dramatic pauses that come with them. The seamless shift of a dual-clutch gearbox robs you of that.

With only a small screen in the instrument cluster (above), the Utopia's interior won't look dated when it's on the lawn at Pebble Beach in 50 years.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG PAJO

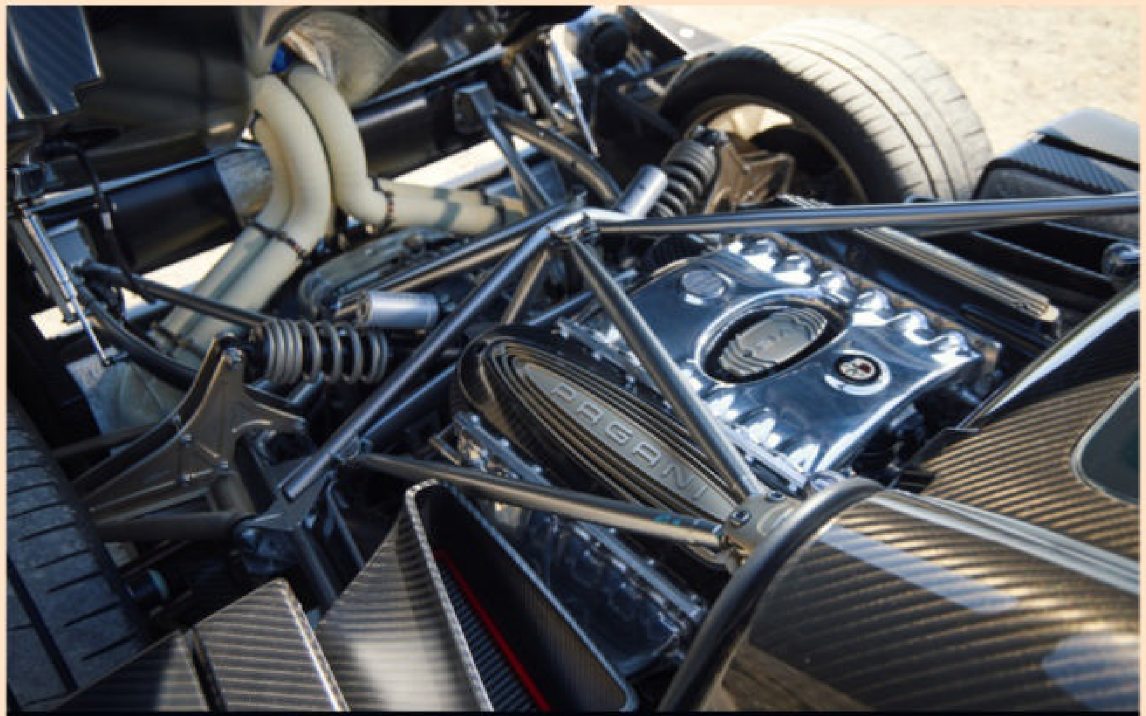
Drivelines

We're not sure we agree with Mr. Pagani on the refinement and application aspects, but the weight penalty is real.

A latticework of chrome-moly steel tubing connects the carbon-fiber tub to front and rear subframes (also chrome-moly), which carry the loads of the engine, transmission, and forged-aluminum suspension components. The suspension uses unequal-length control arms at every corner, and the coil-over springs surround adaptive dampers that have never looked so good [see "All Inboard!," right]. You'll probably want to open the front and rear clamshells on occasion just to stare at it all.

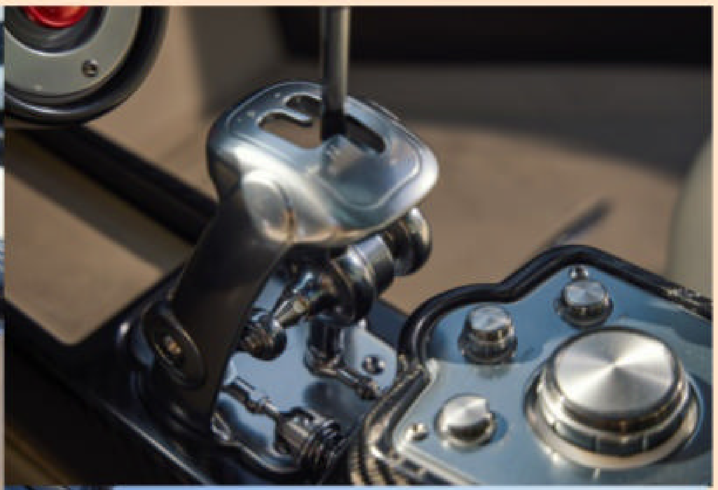
When you drive the Utopia, you're amazed at how civilized it feels. It certainly rides firm, but not nearly as stiff as you'd expect, and when we were almost back to home base, we discovered a secret button that dials up a supersoft setting that lies below Comfort. The carbon-ceramic brakes likewise give no hint of the massive power available underfoot. Their action depends more on pressure than pedal movement, but you acclimate quickly.

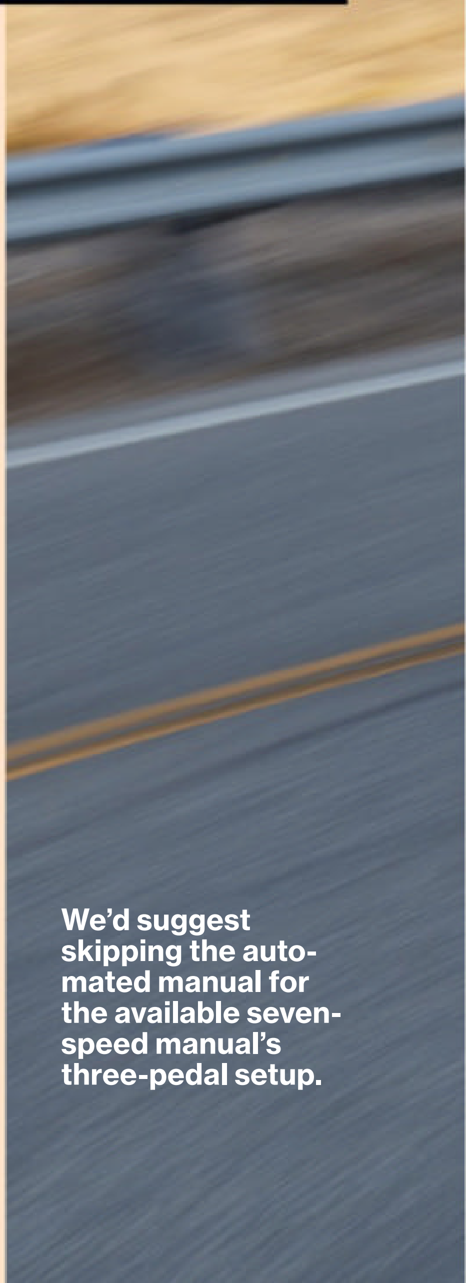
Up the pace, and the Utopia comes alive. Attacking apexes and booting it out of corners never felt so surreal, so bolted down. Paganis are known for their active aero, and this one has it in the rear. Driving at a decent clip, however, you're too busy to see the wing moving. All you know is the Brembo brakes haul you down smartly, and



All Inboard!

Pagani uses unequal-length control arms on the Utopia, but it mounts the coil-over spring and damper assemblies inboard on the chassis. This layout is notable because more of the assembly is now sprung weight, having moved away from unsprung weight, which is the bad cholesterol of suspension-dom. It is also a boon to tuning because you can adjust the motion ratio (how much the damper and spring move relative to the wheel) with a slightly different bell crank. The same goes for the anti-roll bar, which attaches to a different part of the bell crank. This setup isn't quite like a Formula 1 car's, though. An F1 car has a pushrod (or a pullrod) mounted diagonally between the arms to bring the load into the inboard-mounted dampers. The Utopia, on the other hand, uses a reinforced upper control arm to act as the bell crank. Beyond that, Pagani has another reason for going this route: It is stunning.





We'd suggest skipping the automated manual for the available seven-speed manual's three-pedal setup.

then you line up to prepare for the next corner. The steering courses with the feel and purity of a no-assist setup. And it mostly is, because the electric aid ebbs away above 25 mph. The tires, optional Pirelli P Zero Trofeo RS rubber sized 265/35ZR-21 up front and 325/30ZR-22 in the back, do their part, and each is embossed with an outline of the car.

Inside, the first thing you notice is amazing outward visibility. Even the tiny rear window is positioned so you can use the rearview mirror. Closer to hand, notice that Pagani carves the steering wheel and its spokes and hub from one great block of aluminum. The seats have a knob between your legs that you twist to adjust the pitch. And let's not forget that shifter. Even with the automated manual transmission, this piece is a sight to behold, with everything exposed and brilliantly milled. At night, the glow of the controls—all analog switches and knobs—permeates the cabin from behind the mounting surface. The only screen is a small one that sits between the speedometer and the tachometer.

And that's the thing about the Pagani Utopia. This is a hypercar that feels raw, but it's also refined. It looks drop-dead gorgeous, but it's also single-minded in its purpose. It is a machine, but it is also art. *—Dan Edmunds*

2024 PAGANI UTOPIA
Vehicle Type: mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door coupe **Base (*C/D* est):** $2,500,000 **Engine:** twin-turbocharged and intercooled SOHC 36-valve V-12, aluminum block and heads, port fuel injection **Displacement:** 365 in^3, 5980 cm^3 **Power:** 852 hp @ 6000 rpm **Torque:** 811 lb-ft @ 2800 rpm **Transmissions:** 7-speed manual, 7-speed automated manual **Wheelbase:** 110.1 in **L/W/H:** 182.6/80.1/46.3 in **Curb Weight (*C/D* est):** 3100 lb **PERFORMANCE (*C/D* EST) 60 mph:** 3.1–3.4 sec **100 mph:** 5.5–5.7 sec **1/4-Mile:** 10.2–10.5 sec **Top Speed:** 217 mph **EPA Fuel Economy (*C/D* est) Combined:** 11–12 mpg

The Utopia is just the third main model from Pagani, following the Zonda and Huayra. All use V-12s sourced from Mercedes.

Medium Spicy

Kia K4 GT-Line Turbo **HIGHS:** Lengthy list of features, spacious interior, generous trunk. **LOWS:** Uncomfortably flat seats, rivals are quicker, only modest grip.

NOT EVERYONE LIKES buldak, but you wouldn't call the Korean spicy chicken dish bland. The Kia K4's design is similar in that it may not appeal to all, but it's hardly boring.

Unlike the inoffensive but easily overlooked Forte it replaces, the K4 is no wallflower. A long and visually low hood, swollen fenders, and a steeply raked rear window impart the athletic proportions of a sports sedan. Step up to the GT-Line, which starts at $26,345, for more flattering 18-inch wheels. For another $2900, the GT-Line gets a 190-hp turbocharged 1.6-liter four and an eight-speed automatic transmission in place of the base 147-hp 2.0-liter and CVT. (Gone is the Forte GT's available six-speed manual.)

With a healthy 195 pound-feet of torque, the K4 GT-Line Turbo has ample low-end grunt for pulling away from stops. Push past the torque peak at 4500 rpm, and the 1.6-liter engine cries uncle until the transmission upshifts around 6000 rpm. The car gets to 60 mph in 7.3 seconds, a reasonable run but no match for the 200-hp Honda Civic Hybrid's 6.2-second figure or the 250-hp Mazda 3 Turbo's 5.6-second sprint. Passing is an even sorer spot for the Kia, with a 4.1-second turn from 30 to 50 mph, courtesy of the smooth-shifting but slow-witted gearbox.

The GT-Line uses a multilink rear suspension rather than the torsion-beam setup in lesser K4s. Though it isn't the most comfortable option out there, the firm-riding GT-Line's chassis never feels flustered over pitted pavement. Avoid prodding this car too hard in corners, though, as the steering's lack of tactility and the tires' limited grip are a recipe for stability-control intervention. We saw an unremarkable 0.83 g on the skidpad.

Passenger and trunk space are generous. The front-seat bottoms, however, are flatter than Nebraska. Rear-seat riders enjoy plentiful legroom and their own set of air vents, which are exclusive to the GT-Line Turbo. The Technology package nudged our car's as-tested price to $31,445—still $1400 less than a Civic Hybrid Sport Touring. And the K4 comes with a few high-end features that are missing on the top Civic. But the Kia can't match the Honda's driving dynamics, straight-line performance, or fuel efficiency.

While the K4 GT-Line Turbo might not be spicy enough for performance enthusiasts on a budget, it does have a unique and tasty flavor all its own. *—Greg Fink*

The K4 probably isn't named for Kansas's state tax-withholding form because that would be weird.

2025 KIA K4 GT-LINE TURBO

Vehicle Type: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 4-door sedan **Base/As Tested:** $29,245/ $31,445 **Engine:** turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 16-valve inline-4, aluminum block and head, direct fuel injection **Displacement:** 98 in^3, 1598 cm^3 **Power:** 190 hp @ 6000 rpm **Torque:** 195 lb-ft @ 1700 rpm **Transmission:** 8-speed automatic **Wheelbase:** 107.1 in **L/W/H:** 185.4/72.8/55.9 in ***C/D*** **Curb Weight:** 3285 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	7.3 sec
1/4-Mile	15.7 sec @ 90 mph
100 mph	20.0 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	7.7 sec
Top Speed (*C/D* est)	130 mph
Braking, 70–0 mph	173 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.83 g

FUEL ECONOMY

C/D **Observed**	25 mpg
75-mph Hwy Fuel Economy/Range	35 mpg/430 mi
EPA Combined (*C/D* est)	29 mpg

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL SIMARI

Yin-Yang Blat Rat

An updated **Audi RS3** maintains mechanical symbiosis.

RAMPING UP THE POWER is one way to get around a track faster, but a straight-line missile can trip over its own rubber-soled feet once a corner shows up. It's vital to balance power with agility. The 2025 Audi RS3's mid-cycle redo boosts the supercompact's handling on the road and the track without throwing off the feel.

There are changes you can see—headlights, bumpers, steering wheel, gauges, shifter—though the ones you can't are more impactful. The torque-vectoring rear differential uses a pair of clutch packs to send up to 100 percent of the available torque to either rear wheel and gets some algorithm tweaks to improve communication with the stability control, adaptive dampers, and other systems. The goal is to boost turn-in and improve corner-exit speeds.

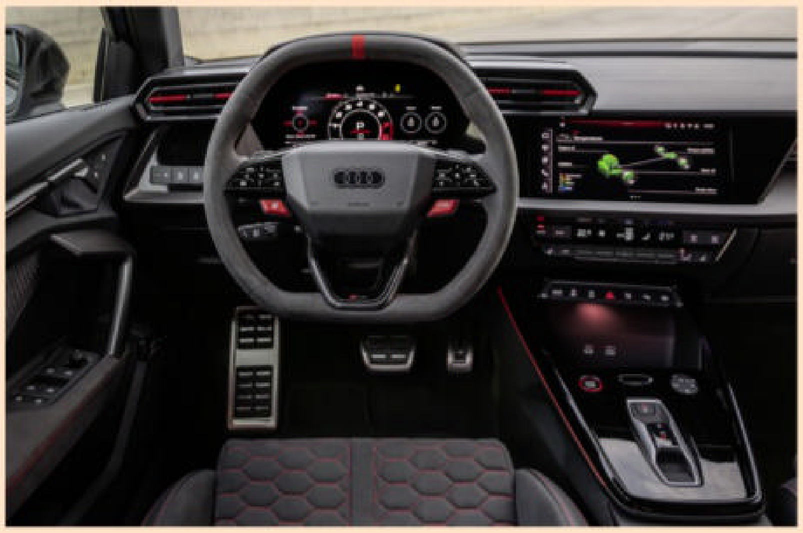
The turbocharged 2.5-liter inline-five and seven-speed dual-clutch automatic continue as before, and that's a good thing. The last of its kind, this cylinder quintet thrums like nothing else on the road. We expect U.S.-bound RS3s to churn out the same 401 horses and 369 pound-feet as before, but European models we drove have slightly less oomph. The sprint to 60 mph should take just 3.3 seconds.

Audi says two new tire offerings for the RS3, Bridgestone's Potenza Sport and Pirelli's P Zero R, split the difference between a standard summer tire and R-compound track rubber. These C-rated tires, as Audi calls them, promise better wet-weather stability while still approaching the dry-weather stick of a full R.

In their softest setting, the standard adaptive dampers effectively soak up a reasonable amount of underfoot nastiness; the RS3's inherent stiffness still comes through, but not so strongly that it feels like the dampers are full of cold molasses. That general vibe of smoothness extends to the transmission too. Audi's dual-clutch automatic never feels sluggish or sloppy.

There's so much chassis performance baked into the RS3 that you'll never approach the edge of its envelope on the road. On the track, though, the new tires and algorithm updates deliver palpable changes. The 2025 model offers crisper turn-in, and you can better sense the torque-vectoring diff working to steer from the rear. The package feels supernaturally sorted at attack pace, even when you accidentally overshoot a braking zone and force it into a corner too fast. Clip an apex, mash the right pedal, point the steering wheel in the right direction, and the RS3 will figure it all out and shoot itself toward the next corner.

Feeling more buttoned-down in the curves means the RS3 isn't quite as raucous as it used to be, but there are ways around that. Putting the stability control into ESC Sport mode offers a good amount of leeway, and folks who really want to watch their tires burn can engage the drift-inducing RS Torque Rear mode. No matter the mode, a Phil Spector–approved wall of five-cylinder warble greets you, as do a chassis and powertrain that effectively operate as one. Good balance, indeed. —*Andrew Krok*



The RS3's steerer merges a circle and a hexagon to create a . . . circagon? The novelty shift toggle works, but it occupies a lot of prime real estate.

2025 AUDI RS3
Vehicle Type: front-engine, all-wheel-drive, 4-door sedan **Base (*C/D* est):** $65,000 **Engine:** turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 20-valve inline-5, aluminum block and head, port and direct fuel injection **Displacement:** 151 in^3, 2480 cm^3 **Power (*C/D* est):** 401 hp @ 6500 rpm **Torque (*C/D* est):** 369 lb-ft @ 3500 rpm **Transmission:** 7-speed dual-clutch automatic **Wheelbase:** 103.6 in **L/W/H:** 178.5/72.9/55.8 in **Curb Weight (*C/D* est):** 3650 lb **PERFORMANCE (*C/D* EST) 60 mph:** 3.3 sec **100 mph:** 8.4 sec **1/4-Mile:** 11.8 sec **Top Speed:** 160 mph **EPA Fuel Economy (*C/D* est) Combined:** 23 mpg

Mileage Booster

Kia Carnival Hybrid **HIGHS:** Big mpg bump, no CVT weirdness, solid ride and handling. **LOWS:** Shared HVAC and audio controls, second-row loungers can't be removed, changing brake-pedal feel.

WE'VE LONG BEEN fans of the Kia Carnival. In our most recent minivan comparison test, it finished second to the Toyota Sienna, a hybrid ["Minivans and Best-Laid Plans," May 2023]. A major reason for its loss was fuel economy. The new Carnival Hybrid addresses that disadvantage.

The 2025 Carnival Hybrid is rated at 33 mpg combined, a whopping 57 percent increase over the standard 3.5-liter V-6. However, that large gain applies only to lower-speed driving. In our 75-mph highway test, the hybrid averaged 29 mpg, worse than the Sienna and the rest of the gas-minivan segment, aside from the V-6 Carnival.

A 178-hp, 195-lb-ft turbocharged 1.6-liter inline-four is supplemented with an electric motor that contributes 74 horses and a healthy 224 pound-feet. They produce a combined 242 ponies and 271 pound-feet. The electric motor's torque means the engine doesn't feel like a wimpy four-banger. The hybrid's 7.8-second run to 60 mph tied the V-6 model's, although the hybrid is less enthusiastic above 80 mph. The transmission, with no continuously variable slushiness, steps through the gears like any other six-speed automatic.

With the brake regen set to medium or high, the hybrid's small battery fills quickly, at which point you get a warning chime and an unwelcome change in pedal feel. With nowhere to put the extra energy, the regeneration simply ceases.

Road impacts are neatly handled, and noise is thoroughly smothered. Body motions are kept in check, with little bounce or float. As for cornering grip, we measured 0.80 g, but you probably weren't planning a canyon run with a Carnival.

All 2025 Carnivals wear a tweaked design that makes them look a bit more SUV-like than the competition. Inside, the changes include the

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Kia's newest interface that sits between driver and passenger uses shared controls for the HVAC and audio systems. It isn't our favorite.

adoption of a binnacle-free display. In a move sure to confuse customers, the HVAC and radio functions share controls. One knob adjusts the volume or, at the flip of a toggle, the interior temperature. On higher trim levels, second-row dentist-chair-like lounge seats are available, but they aren't removable, limiting practicality.

The base price of our SX Prestige, the most expensive variant, is $53,995. The hybrid trims cost $2000 more than their V-6 counterparts, but fuel savings should pay that back in a few years. Time for a rematch with the Sienna to see which minivan reigns supreme. *—Dan Edmunds*

2025 KIA CARNIVAL HYBRID SX PRESTIGE

Vehicle Type: front-engine, front-motor, front-wheel-drive, 7-passenger, 4-door van **Base/As Tested:** $53,995/$56,760 **Engine:** turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 16-valve 1.6-liter inline-4, 178 hp, 195 lb-ft **Motor:** AC, 74 hp, 224 lb-ft **Combined Output:** 242 hp, 271 lb-ft **Transmission:** 6-speed automatic **Battery Pack:** air-cooled lithium-ion, 0.7 kWh (*C/D* est) **Wheelbase:** 121.7 in **L/W/H:** 203.0/78.5/69.9 in ***C/D* Curb Weight:** 4985 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	7.8 sec
1/4-Mile	16.1 sec @ 87 mph
100 mph	25.0 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.3 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	9.3 sec
Top Speed (*C/D* est)	115 mph
Braking, 70–0 mph	180 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	0.80 g

FUEL ECONOMY

***C/D* Observed**	29 mpg
75-mph Hwy Fuel Economy/Range	29 mpg/550 mi
EPA Combined	33 mpg

Lovable Scamp

Lotus Emira First Edition **HIGHS:** Looks a treat, gurgles like a happy baby, sips gas. **LOWS:** Unpolished shifts, barely lighter than the V-6, no manual.

IT'S A RASCAL. Some might say the four-cylinder Lotus Emira needs more discipline, but we think the British sports car's quirks add to its charm. The Emira is plenty quick and surprisingly efficient, so if it occasionally burps or gets rowdy in polite company, we can forgive that for the pleasure of its presence.

More than just fun, this mid-engine Brit is also a beauty—compact and curvy, it sits low to the pavement yet easily clears speed bumps. The petite exterior belies an airy, uncluttered interior that's not stingy with the leather and faux suede.

This Emira is a First Edition in Sports trim, which brings a stiffer suspension and Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tires. Its turbocharged 2.0-liter inline-four from Mercedes-AMG and eight-speed dual-clutch automatic join the existing Toyota-sourced supercharged 3.5-liter V-6 that's available with a six-speed automatic or a six-speed manual. Sadly, the four is automatic only.

Surprisingly, both engines make the same 400 horsepower, and the four, at 3245 pounds, is just 34 pounds lighter than the manual V-6. Yet, the 2.0-liter is quicker by 1.0 second in the quarter-mile, and launch control allowed it to race to 60 mph in 3.4 seconds, 0.9 ahead of the six. On the street, the four is as chatty as a cage of parakeets, whistling, sighing, and squawking. With the windows down—and let's celebrate a car that doesn't beat your eardrums when the windows are down—it's not wind buffeting you hear but the snorting of the intake in the wide rear flanks. Even casual driving is entertaining, and when you step on it and get those whip cracks on the downshifts? Smiles, everyone. Smiles.

Not that this sweetie is perfect. In Tour mode, getting on the throttle leaves you hanging in high gear while the turbo spools and the eight-speed downshifts. So switch to Sport mode or use the paddles, and this Emira on a canyon road is one of the most fun drives one can have.

The handling wasn't all rosy, though, as the car had a tendency to wiggle its nose at triple-digit speeds. Even so, we pulled 1.08 g's on the skidpad and stopped from 100 mph in 289 feet.

A Porsche Cayman is surely better behaved. But we like a scoundrel, and the Emira is so endearing that we'd overlook its flaws for the joy of driving it again. *—Elana Scherr*

2024 LOTUS EMIRA FIRST EDITION

Vehicle Type: mid-engine, rear-wheel-drive, 2-passenger, 2-door coupe **Base/As Tested:** \$102,250/\$102,250 **Engine:** turbocharged and intercooled DOHC 16-valve inline-4, aluminum block and heads, port and direct fuel injection **Displacement:** 122 in^3, 1991 cm^3 **Power:** 400 hp @ 6600 rpm **Torque:** 354 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm **Transmission:** 8-speed dual-clutch automatic **Wheelbase:** 101.4 in **L/W/H:** 173.7/74.6/48.3 in ***C/D*** **Curb Weight:** 3245 lb

TEST RESULTS

60 mph	3.4 sec
100 mph	8.0 sec
1/4-Mile	11.7 sec @ 119 mph
130 mph	14.5 sec
150 mph	22.4 sec

Results above omit 1-ft rollout of 0.2 sec.

Rolling Start, 5–60 mph	4.5 sec
Top Speed (mfr claim)	181 mph
Braking, 70–0/100–0 mph	145/289 ft
Roadholding, 300-ft Skidpad	1.08 g

FUEL ECONOMY

C/D **Observed**	24 mpg
EPA Combined (*C/D* est)	25 mpg

Parent company Geely supplied some of the interior parts, and the result is a far better fit and finish than in the Emira's predecessor, the Evora.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA LYNN WALKER

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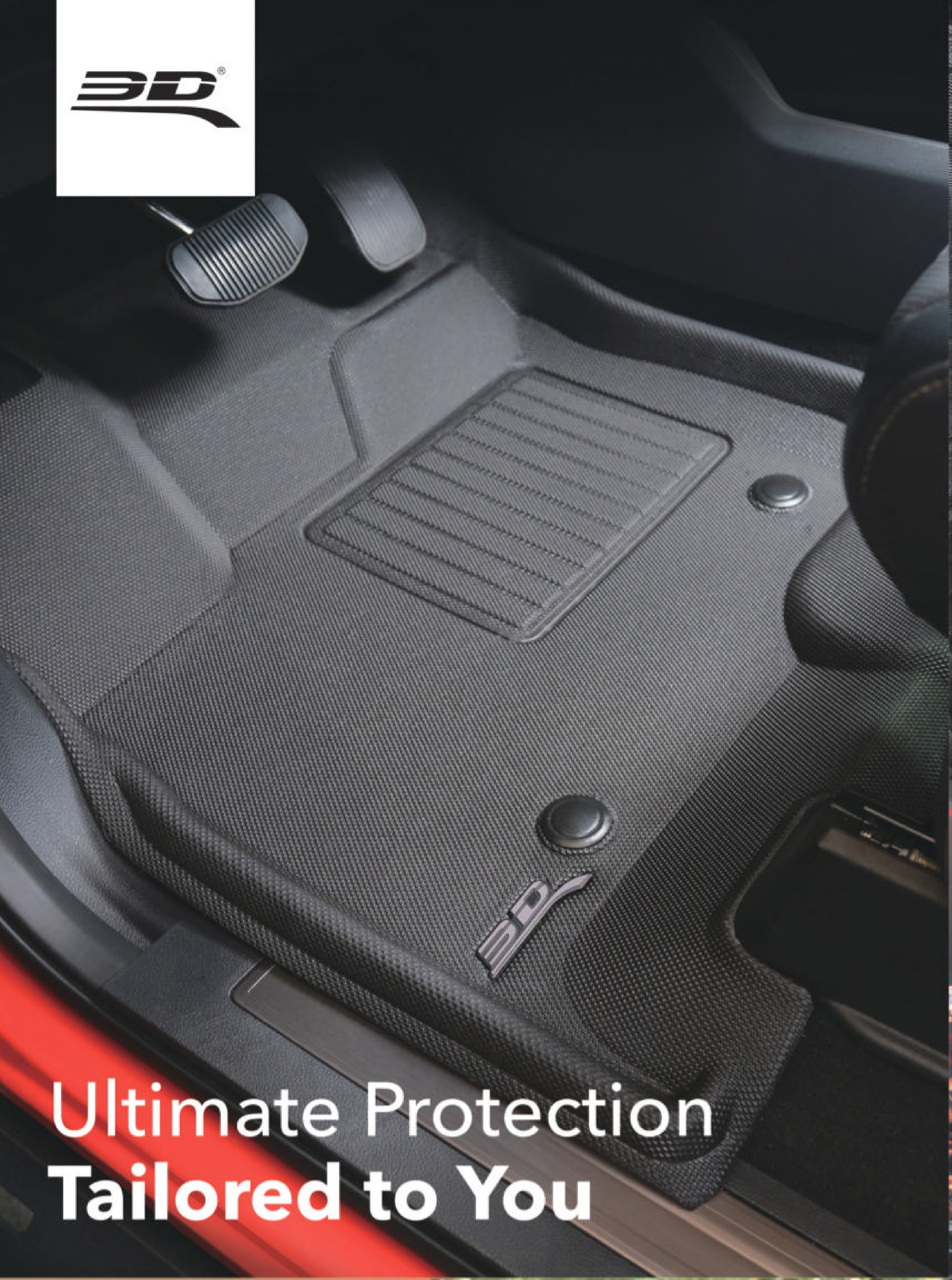

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Drivelines: Blips

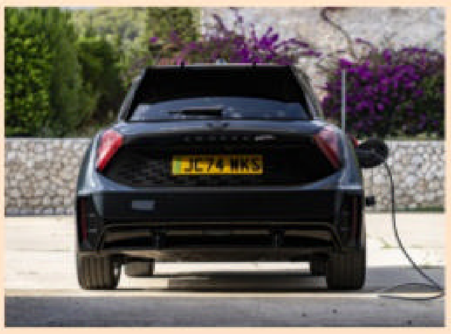
HIGHLIGHTING THE DETAILS THAT MATTER

THE RED MIST DESCENDS

It's been more than a decade since we first saw Ferrari's previous halo car, the LaFerrari. Now it's time to say hello to its spiritual successor. Limited to 799 examples, the Ferrari F80 returns to a naming convention last used on the F60 America. Like the LaFerrari, it's a hybrid. This time an 888-hp twin-turbo 3.0-liter V-6 pairs with a trio of electric motors and a small battery to produce a combined 1184 horsepower. With that much power and all-wheel drive, we bet it'll hit 60 mph in 2.0 seconds or less. While we'll miss the V-12, the six's 9200-rpm rev limit should produce a mighty aural assault. But Ferraris are about more than raw power, and the F80 delivers in other ways. At 155 mph, active aero helps produce 2315 pounds of downforce. Pricing starts at a hair over $3 million. (Since one hypercar is never enough, keep reading to see what McLaren has coming.)

MOTOR CITY MARKDOWN

The **Ford Mustang Mach-E** sees across-the-board price reductions for 2025. The starting figure drops $3500 to $38,490, the Premium gets a $4000 discount, and the hopped-up Rally model slices off a whopping $7400, sliding in at $57,990. You might wonder what Ford cut from the model to make the numbers work, but the '25 Mach-E actually picks up a newly standard heat pump, a column-mounted shifter, and the latest version of BlueCruise hands-free driver assistance.



COOPER WORKS TO BARREL ELECTRICITY

Mini's speedy **John Cooper Works** vehicles finally enter the EV era with the introduction of electric JCW versions of the Cooper hardtop and Aceman crossover. Both models rely on a single electric motor powering the front wheels to the tune of 254 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque. It's all enough to send the hardtop to 62 mph in a claimed 5.9 seconds, with the Aceman requiring an additional half-second. Go-Kart mode unlocks an additional 27 horsepower via a paddle on the steering wheel. However, because Mini builds both models in China, the electric hot hatches' arrival in the U.S. market has been delayed—perhaps indefinitely.

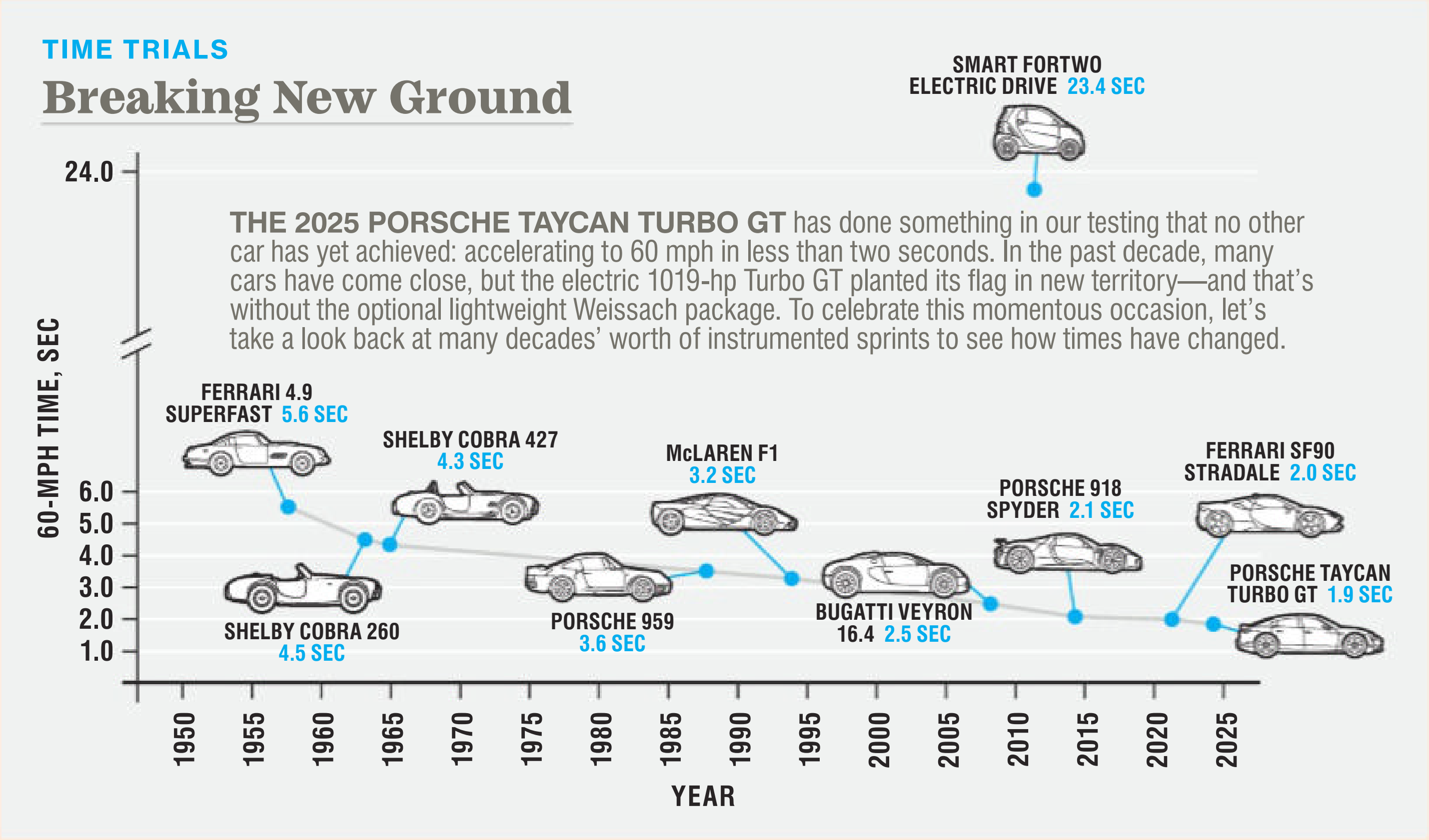
NEW 911 GT3 SHEDS MASS, TORQUE

The rollout of the 992.2 generation of the **Porsche 911** continues with the 2025 GT3. Unlike the GTS, which went hybrid, the GT3 remains powered solely by a naturally aspirated 4.0-liter flat-six, which makes 502 horsepower and 331 pound-feet of torque. That's a 15-lb-ft reduction from before, owing to stricter emission regulations. A six-speed manual transmission (above) remains available along with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic. The suspension picks up some new tricks from the GT3 RS, while a new Weissach package sheds some mass through increased use of carbon-fiber-reinforced plastic.

PARTY OF W1

McLaren may not have built as many halo cars as its prancing-horse rival, but Woking's latest looks to be every bit as wild as Ferrari's new F80. The **McLaren W1** (below) follows in the tire tracks of the F1 and P1 before it, packing immense amounts of power and track capability. Like the new Ferrari, this McLaren is a hybrid, but while the F80 uses a V-6 for the internal-combustion portion of its powertrain, the W1 relies on a twin-turbocharged 4.0-liter V-8. Like the Ferrari V-6, the W1's V-8 revs to 9200 rpm. The V-8 combines with a single electric motor for a total of 1258 horsepower and 988 pound-feet of torque, and the supercar launches to 60 mph in a claimed 2.7 seconds. That number seems conservative, however, given that lesser McLaren models have proved to be quicker in our hands. Only 399 people will be lucky enough to scoop up a W1. With a $2.1 million starting price, this supercar seems like a bargain next to its Italian rival.

FORD AND JEEP: MARC URBANO; LEXUS: KGP PHOTOGRAPHY


TIME TRIALS

Breaking New Ground

THE 2025 PORSCHE TAYCAN TURBO GT has done something in our testing that no other car has yet achieved: accelerating to 60 mph in less than two seconds. In the past decade, many cars have come close, but the electric 1019-hp Turbo GT planted its flag in new territory—and that's without the optional lightweight Weissach package. To celebrate this momentous occasion, let's take a look back at many decades' worth of instrumented sprints to see how times have changed.

60-MPH TIME, SEC
24.0
6.0
5.0
4.0
3.0
2.0
1.0
1950
1955
1960
1965
1970
1975
1980
1985
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1995
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2005
2010
2015
2020
2025
YEAR
SMART FORTWO ELECTRIC DRIVE 23.4 SEC
FERRARI 4.9 SUPERFAST 5.6 SEC
SHELBY COBRA 260 4.5 SEC
SHELBY COBRA 427 4.3 SEC
PORSCHE 959 3.6 SEC
McLAREN F1 3.2 SEC
BUGATTI VEYRON 16.4 2.5 SEC
PORSCHE 918 SPYDER 2.1 SEC
FERRARI SF90 STRADALE 2.0 SEC
PORSCHE TAYCAN TURBO GT 1.9 SEC

SUBIE'S NEO-STI

It looks increasingly like the WRX STI is gone for good, but the new **Subaru WRX tS** isn't too far off the mark. This new variant features a blend of bits from the GT and TR models. Goodies include big Brembo brakes with gold-painted calipers (instead of red like the TR's), adaptive dampers, and special styling elements inside and out. A six-speed manual is the only transmission on offer, and plenty of STI logos are scattered about if you want to pretend. We took a tS around California's Sonoma Raceway. While we wish the 271-hp turbo flat-four had more power, we fell in love with the strong brakes and tight body control.

LEXUS REENTERS THE 'RING

In the dozen or so years since the Lexus LFA went out of production, its legend has only grown. Now the Japanese luxury brand appears to be preparing to enter the supercar game once again. We recently got our hands on spy photographs of what appears to be a new Toyota-family halo car lapping the Nürburgring Nordschleife, and our shooter reports that there are at least two test mules roaming around Germany. The pictures reveal a svelte sports car with a massive fixed wing in the back. Audio and video evidence leads us to believe that this new supercar, which could go by the name **Lexus LFR**, will rely on a hybrid V-8 powertrain. Consider us stoked.

NONZERO GRAVITY

Intrigued by the idea of a Lucid but need an SUV rather than a sedan? The 2025 **Lucid Gravity** might be the EV for you. It starts at $81,550 in Touring trim, just $1150 more than an equivalent Air sedan. But don't expect to take delivery of this SUV until later in the year. The higher-margin Gravity Grand Touring arrives much sooner, and at $96,550, it's $15,850 less than the Air Grand Touring. The Touring's outputs haven't been announced yet, but we estimate 620 horsepower or so, while the Grand Touring will push 828 horses.

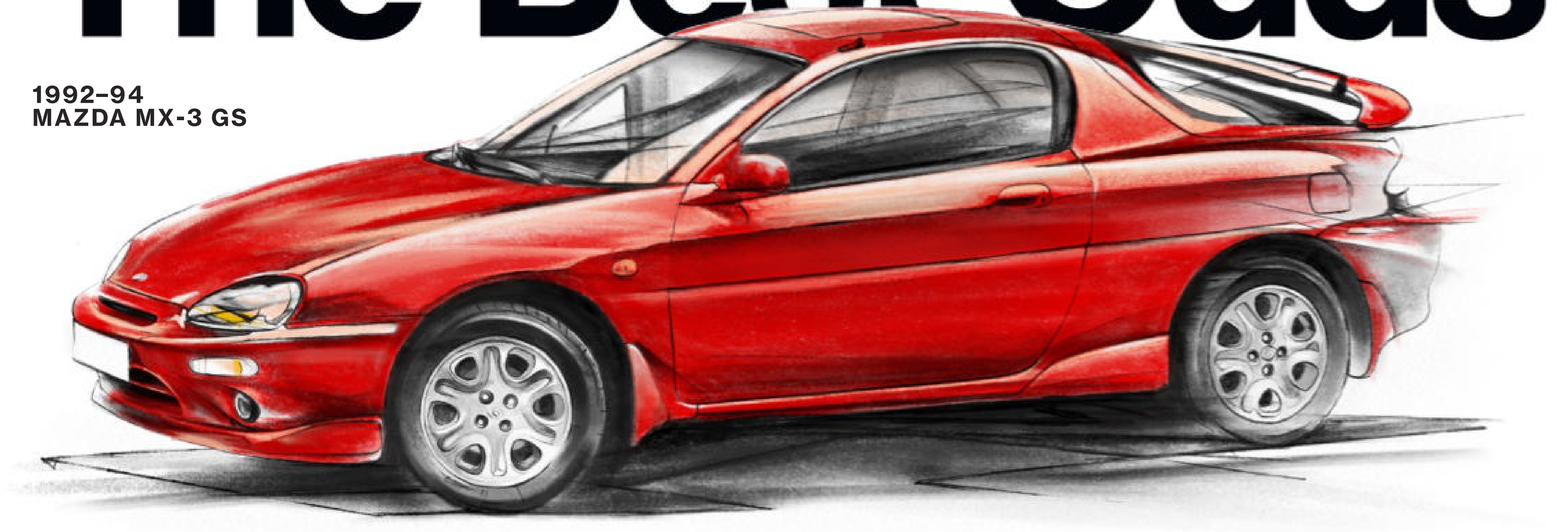
HOW TO GO PRO

As its name suggests, the **Mercedes-AMG GT63 Pro** is all about track performance. Its twin-turbocharged 4.0-liter V-8 packs 603 horsepower and 627 pound-feet of torque, while several aerodynamic tweaks reduce front-end lift by over 66 pounds and add as much as 33 pounds of downforce to the rear. Liquid-cooled differentials, standard carbon-ceramic brakes, and available Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2R tires round out the major changes. On the track, we found a consummate professional with sharp turn-in that used its variable all-wheel-drive system to chew up corners and rocket out the other side. When you're piloting this German rocket in anger, it's hard not to feel like you could turn pro.

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

The obituary for the V-8 continues. Like the Grand Cherokee, the Wagoneer, and the Grand Wagoneer before it, the **Jeep Grand Cherokee L** is no longer offering a V-8, which in this case was a 357-hp 5.7-liter engine. What's left is the familiar 293-hp 3.6-liter V-6. That cuts the L's max towing capacity, which was 7200 pounds with the V-8, to 6200 pounds. We hold out hope that Jeep might reintroduce a higher-output option in the form of a twin-turbo inline-six or a plug-in-hybrid powertrain.

The Best Odds



1992–94
MAZDA MX-3 GS

The cars I recall most fondly were neither the prettiest nor the quickest. Certainly not the most expensive. They were machines that emerged willfully peculiar and intractably idiosyncratic. by John Phillips

SOMETIMES—NOT OFTEN, BUT sometimes—car manufacturers create something semi-wondrous that is also borderline irrational and three-quarters inexplicable to their own marketing types. A Chevrolet Corvette masquerading as a Cadillac XLR, for instance. A tiresome Pontiac LeMans that arose as a Woodward Avenue legend thanks to a would-be cocaine dealer. A British trucklet that deployed as a tractor after World War II and, once adorned in cowskins and bird's-eye maple, emerged as a status symbol for hedge-funders.

In the early '90s, every automobile that Mazda sold here—even its carlike MPV minivan—was a glittering ingot that we admired: the MX-5 Miata, the MX-6, the Protegé, the RX-7, the 323, the 626, the 929. Each sparkled in the niche it contested.

That Mazda was fearless could be proved with two words: Wankel rotary. Yet the company offered a second bizarro powerplant that few remember. That's because the number of Mazda MX-3s to scuff rubber in the U.S. roughly equals the number of Higgs bosons I can capture in a jar of Wild Turkey.

The MX-3 GS was a sylphlike if modestly bug-eyed coupe with a slick 0.31 coefficient of drag. At only 2540 pounds, it was as lean and austere as mountain air. Its 60-degree V-6 displaced—hold on to your reading glasses—1.8 liters, making it one of the automotive world's smallest V-6s. It managed only 130 horsepower yet ripped to its 7000-rpm redline in the time it takes to swat a fly. It was not only as smooth as a Singer sewing machine but also nearly the same size and heft. This engine felt expensive. Should I drive it to a jeweler for servicing?

I crowed about this car. Made pronouncements about its Charlie Hustle vitality. "Its engine thrums like a GE turbine inside a monster spillway 200 feet below your feet," I gushed. As eager as the inline-six in a BMW, it was also more fun than Volkswagen's then-aborning narrow-angle V-6.

The MX-3 GS won its lone *Car and Driver* comparo, despite its middling 7.4-second sprint to 60 mph. You'd gratuitously change gears to sample its rod-linkage shifter. Its top speed was 127 mph, and it had a three-year/50,000-mile warranty. All from an econobox costing less than $15,000. How is that not miraculous?

Back then, I was *C/D*'s executive editor. So I plastered an aqua MX-3 on our August '91 cover, even though that month Chicago's Rick Mancuso had offered me two weeks in his Ferrari F40.

"People get fired for shit like this," warned managing editor Steve Spence. That month's newsstand sales—two decimal points south of dismal—underscored his prophecy. To shoppers, the MX-3 was just a Japanese hatchback.

I confronted Mazda's PR chief along with their in-house performance guru Rod Millen: "You gotta tell people about this engine," I shrilled with more self-importance than necessary. "For starters, it should power the Miata."

"What will a few extra horsepower do?" Millen wondered.

"It will transform the Miata into something better than . . ."—here I stumbled, stared at my loafers, then blurted, "a Maserati Spyder," noting my admiration for the trident brand's own diminutive V-6. There ensued the crushing silence of the Psalms Reading Room in any Midwest funeral home. Closely followed by the pocket-size V-6's own interment. Three model years and done.

Time passed. I went to Hiroshima to learn about Mazda's Miller-cycle V-6 intended for the Millenia sedan, another mechanical beguiler that arrived and departed unwitnessed. Next to me slouched a shy engineer whose passion was motorcycles. I asked, "You know who built that little V-6 in the MX-3?"

He sucked maybe 60 liters of air through his teeth, grabbed my shoulder, then led me 20 feet to a window in front of a dark dyno cell. "Me," he hissed. He scanned the room for eavesdroppers. There was spit on his chin.

"What went wrong?" I asked.

"People went crazy. 'Frictional losses!' they said. Also expensive. More pistons, more rods, a fancy crankshaft, eight new valves, variable runners. People lose jobs for shit like that."

"I've heard that before," I told him.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEXIS MARCOU

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you won't remember my name

this is the last time
this is the last time

you will see me at the top
you will see me at the top

my doubts
my doubts

will destroy
will destroy

my dreams
my dreams

the more I seem to learn
the more I seem to learn

the more I seem to lose
the more I seem to lose

I want to carry on
I want to carry on

but not today
But not today

This is the point I give up

Turn upside down and read again

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